

Tenant Involvement Strategy



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1. Purpose of the strategy

This strategy is the main document that sets out how tenants can influence the way decisions are taken about housing services. It explains what information we will provide, how we consult with tenants and how we take account of their views.

The strategy sets out what information tenants can expect to receive from us, and explains tenants' rights to become involved and our duties to consult with them.

It is intended for this to be a 'live working document' that tenants and staff can refer to as a guide to the range of ways that tenants can get involved. As we engage and involve more tenants, aspirations and preferences may develop as we look to improve the way we work with them. Therefore, this strategy may adapt and evolve over time.

2. Benefits of tenant involvement

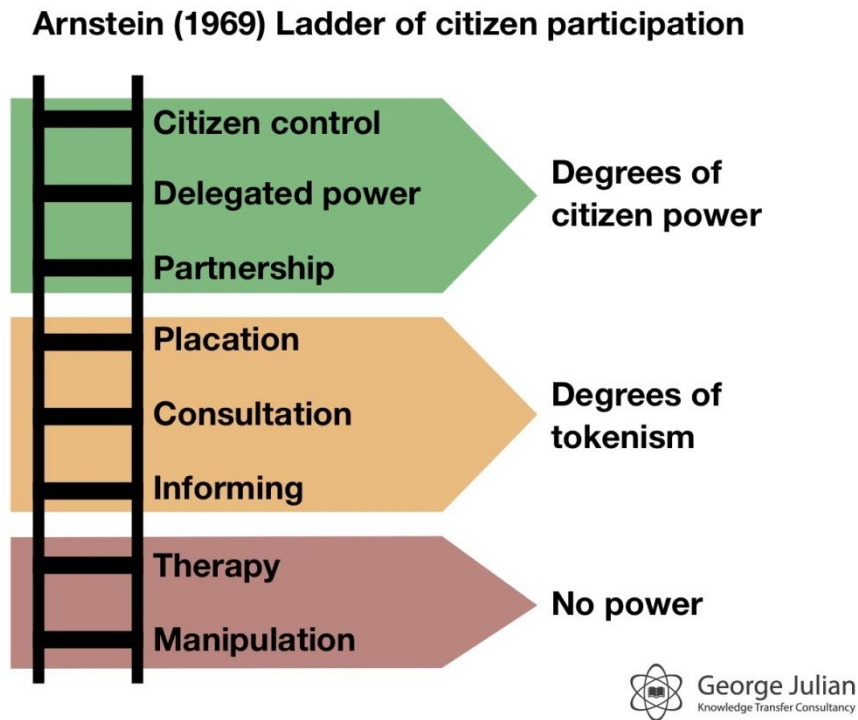
Our core values are to strive for **quality** in everything that we do, we are a **caring** organisation that will put people first and we take **pride** in the ways that we serve our tenants and maintain our properties. We are also proud of our **financial strength and efficiency** and are aiming for sustainable **growth**.

In line with these values we are committed to developing effective tenant involvement and in empowering our tenants to be involved. We consider the following to be the main benefits of tenant involvement:

- Better service delivery
- Increased efficiency and value for money
- Increased tenant satisfaction
- Better links between us, our tenants and the communities they live in
- Personal development for tenants
- Tenants are more informed about how their homes are run and managed

- Increased enjoyment of homes

Arnstein's Ladder of citizen participation can be used to help us assess the level of empowerment that our tenants have now and where we'd like it to get to.



The lower rungs of **therapy** and **manipulation** can be considered a forced replacement for genuine participation where the objective is to educate rather than to enable tenants to participate. **Informing** and **consultation** allows tenants to hear and have a voice but they have no power to ensure their views are listened to and acted upon. **Placation** suggests the tenants can advise but we retain the right to decide. **Partnership** enables tenants to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with us. At the top of the ladder is delegated power and citizen control where tenants have the majority of decision-making or full managerial power.

In our 2017 tenant survey, 79% of tenants said they were satisfied that their views are listened to and acted upon. Considering this and the views of our Performance Panel, we believe that currently tenant empowerment is at the

placation stage, we would like to be in **partnership** with our tenants, as a minimum.

3. Regulation

Our regulators, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), have set out in the [Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard](#) what their expectations are of us and these relate to 1) customer service, choice and complaints, 2) involvement and empowerment and 3) responding to the diverse needs of tenants. This strategy aims to address the expectations in relation to points 2) and 3) as 1) is covered in our Customer Care Policy and our Complaints Policy. We also have a separate Equality and Diversity policy.

4. How the strategy was developed

To produce this strategy, we invited all of our tenants to a Strategy Café where we asked for their views on tenant involvement and we had 23 tenants join us. We also sent a survey out to all our tenants and received 260 responses. In addition, we have spoken with our Performance Panel, which is our panel of residents that reviews our performance and services, and door knocked residents in our areas outside of Exeter. All views collated, along with those of our staff, have been considered when drafting this strategy.

5. Key findings of consultation

The following themes have been identified as being important to our tenants when it comes to tenant involvement and empowerment:

- Having a range of different ways to engage with us to meet different needs and preferences;
- Being provided with timely and appropriate information in a format which suits them
- Feeling confident to be involved
- Opportunities to engage with their neighbours and their local community
- Value for money

We also identified that only 54% of tenants know what standards of service they can expect from us, for example, how long it should take for us to complete a repair or respond to an email. This could make it more difficult for tenants to know when they get good or bad service and whether to make a complaint or not.

Many tenants are interested in receiving information about activities in their area and in engaging with their neighbours and community. Whilst this isn't directly related to tenant involvement, we consider opportunities for tenants to engage with each other in their communities relevant in promoting tenant involvement and in empowerment as it can help in forming local groups and in gathering important feedback.

Tenants would also like to receive information about money saving tips and benefits; we believe that helping tenants improve their financial situation means one less thing to worry about so they have more capacity to be involved and engage with us and their local community.

Whilst we are committed to continue providing information in multiple formats to suit needs, some tenants are digitally excluded and need help and support to get on-line. We feel it is important to help tenants to do this as it improves confidence, employment opportunities and provides another way for tenants to engage with us.

6. Aims of the strategy

Based on our consultation we have identified the following aims and objectives for this strategy:

Aim 1 – Increase and promote the opportunities for tenants to become involved

To achieve this aim we will:

- Review tenant involvement leaflets and website content to clearly promote the different ways tenants can be involved, these could be defined as different “Eagle Roles”.

- Develop an email based focus group 'Email Eagles'.
- Investigate using other forms of social media to communicate with tenants.
- Run regular recruitment campaigns.
- Provide regular feedback on the outcomes of tenant involvement such as service reviews.

Aim 2 – Provide timely and appropriate information to tenants in a format to suit their needs

To achieve this aim we will:

- Develop an electronic version of the Tenant Newsletter which can be sent out by email and accessed via our website and Facebook.
- Provide themed workshops on areas which affect tenants, for example, Universal Credit.
- Pilot a money saving tips magazine 'Quids In!', this will initially be in digital format to evaluate feedback from tenants and then we will consider alternative formats.
- Review and update the Tenants Handbook.

Aim 3 – Support a diverse range of tenants to be involved

To achieve this aim we will:

- Enable more tenants to be digitally included through training and advice using 'digital cafes' in local communities.
- Encourage tenants to become 'digital eagles' offering digital support to other tenants.
- Provide the tenant newsletter and annual report in a non-gloss format so it is easily readable.
- Set up a communications group, 'communication eagles', made up of tenants with diverse needs who can regularly review communications going out to tenants to ensure it is accessible and understandable.
- Provide cultural awareness and equality and diversity sessions for staff and tenants.

Aim 4 – Develop ways for tenants to engage within their local community

To achieve this aim we will:

- Investigate partnerships with local activity providers to promote local groups and activities to our tenants.
- Run a series of ‘meet you neighbour’ events in local communities to allow tenants to positively connect with each other.
- Pilot a ‘local eagle’ scheme with tenants who are willing to report back on things affecting their community, this could include things like the cleanliness of their estate.
- Attend local events, fairs, fete’s etc. to promote Cornerstone and tenant involvement.

Aim 5 – Provide more value for money in our tenant involvement work

To achieve this aim we will:

- Provide the Tenant Newsletter on a subscription basis, postal and digital mailing, so we only send copies to tenants that want to receive it and in the format that most suits them.
- Work with tenants to improve the quality of content in the newsletter so that it meets tenants’ requirements and consider developing ‘local reporters’ who can provide content.
- Measure the outcomes of the activities that we undertake by asking tenants to complete a survey telling us how they feel they have benefited.

Aim 6 – Improve empowerment so that tenants are working in partnership with us

To achieve this aim we will:

- Promote the ‘ladder of participation’ and our aims of achieving the partnership rung.
- Provide clear information about registered tenant organisations and support their formation with a ‘start-up’ grant.

- Provide training for involved tenants to build confidence and help them develop new and transferrable skills.
- Provide a quarterly performance report to involved tenants so they can focus their reviews on appropriate areas relevant to tenants.
- Produce a 'Service Standards' document that explains clearly what standards of service tenants can expect from us and empowers them to constructively raise failures in service delivery to us.

7. Tenant consultation

We will ensure that tenants are fully consulted on issues that are likely to affect them. These will include:

- Proposals to alter the tenancy agreement.
- Proposals for developing and/or improving an individual property or group of properties.
- The formulation of housing-related policies and strategic priorities
- Decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- The management of their homes
- The management of repair and maintenance services
- Agreeing local offers for service delivery.
- The best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of our housing management service.

8. Current methods of consultation and involvement

These are some of the ways that we consult with tenants and they can get involved.

Satisfaction surveys

These are completed after tenants have had a repair, an adaptation, reported anti-social behaviour, moved into or out of one of our homes. Tenants are also invited to complete an annual survey about general satisfaction with their home and our services. Surveys could be completed in paper format, over the telephone or on-line. Results are compiled and shared with our Performance

Panel, staff and Board members, they have targets set which are regularly monitored.

Performance Panel

This panel is made up of tenants who get together monthly to review our performance in a broad range of housing services. They decide which services they would like to review based on feedback from tenants in their community and the surveys you complete. Following their review, they make recommendations for improvement to the Senior Management Team and the Board, these are often implemented.

Focus Groups

These might be used for reviewing a particular service, policy or strategy and generally, we will ask for tenant views and to ensure we are getting a tenant perspective and that the messages are clearly communicated. Focus groups might be run via a meeting, via email and/or Facebook.

Tenant groups

We are not aware of any registered or non-registered tenant organisations currently operating within the Cornerstone communities but we are very keen to support tenants in forming a group.

Tenants groups have the right to register with us and may receive an annual grant to cover administration costs such as posting letters to their members. The advantage of registering is that we have a legal duty to consult with registered tenant organisations over proposed changes to housing services. Registered tenant organisations are independent; they have written constitutions, their own committees and records of their accounts that are publicly available.

Local area visits

A member of the housing team will regularly visit estates to inspect them and talk to tenants about issues affecting them; sometimes visits are with managers, other involved tenants and Board members.

Public meetings

These may be used to consult with a wide range of tenants in their local area on an issue affecting them, such as improvements to their homes.

Individual contact

This could include a letter, a telephone call, email or a visit to individual tenants and will most likely occur when we are consulting with them on a specific issue or where personal information may be shared and discussed. Where we are consulting with tenants on something as important as a change to the tenancy agreement, for example, this will usually be done via a letter, except where tenants have particular communication needs.

9. Involving a diverse range of tenants

We do not think our regularly involved tenants are representative of our communities and we are particularly committed to removing any barriers which might prevent tenants from getting involved, where possible. This includes:

- Accessible meeting venues
- Paying reasonable expenses including transport and care for dependents
- Assistance to attend meetings
- Translation services
- Communication aids, such as hearing loop
- Communication preferences met, such as large print
- Provision of training and support

10. Providing information

We provide information to tenants in a range of ways:

Tenancy agreement

This sets out the tenants' rights to information about their terms of their tenancy, our repairing obligations, our performance as a landlord and access to housing related policies and procedures. It also explains that we will consult with tenants before making changes to housing management or maintenance that will have a substantial impact on them.

Tenant Handbook

This provides additional information about tenancies, rent, repairs and maintenance, using the home and what tenants can expect, for example, how long it should take us to complete a repair. It also gives further information about the rights and responsibilities of tenants.

Tenant Annual Report

This provides tenants with information about how we are performing, how satisfied tenants are with the services and homes we provide and how we are spending the income we receive from their rent. It includes our annual charter, which is our local offers to our tenants.

Tenant Newsletter

This is sent to tenants twice a year and it provides tenants with information about changes in services and staff, the work of the Performance Panel, events, welfare benefits, new developments and other articles. It is primarily sent out in the post, which is the preferred method for 80% of tenants but we do now send this out by email to those on our mailing list.

Website

This provides up to date information about us, our services, and other general information about events, it also has links for paying rent and other organisations.

Facebook

This is a closed group accessible only by our tenants and we use it to engage with tenants who are raising queries that might be relevant to multiple tenants.

We also post information about events, training, employment opportunities and community activities.

11. Resources

We will resource tenant involvement and empowerment in the following ways:

- Staff time
- Producing and distributing resident newsletters and annual report
- Producing other printed information such as information leaflets and flyers
- Staff and tenant training
- Staff and tenant attendance at tenant participation events and conferences
- Tenant travel and out of pocket expenses
- Tenant group start-up grants

We will set an annual budget for tenant involvement and empowerment which will ensure the delivery of this strategy and the objectives within it.

12. Monitoring the strategy

The Housing Manager is responsible for delivering this strategy and achievement of the objectives within it; it will be monitored by the Performance Panel, Senior Management Team and the Board.

13. Action Plan

A specific action plan, detailing how the objectives will be achieved, responsibilities and timescales, will be developed and monitored.