

Tenant and Leaseholder
Involvement Strategy 2010/13

Having your say, Do your bit



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Introduction

Our Vision for Tenant and Leaseholder Services in Southampton

A decent home is the foundation for a good quality of life.

Decent homes in decent neighbourhoods give people a springboard to enable them to reach their full potential. A decent home provides a starting point for family life, for good health and for sustainable communities.

This is why the city council is committed to putting people at the heart of our housing services.

Our aim is to provide the best tenant and leaseholder services of any social landlord in the south east of England.

We want residents to feel proud of the service they receive, their home and the neighbourhood they live in. We can only do this by working closely with residents.

To help achieve this aim we will:

1. Raise standards and deliver high levels of customer satisfaction – homes, tenants and leaseholders feel proud of.
2. Create safe and secure neighbourhoods where people want to live and where people respect each other.
3. Understand and meet tenant and leaseholders’ needs at an individual and local level.

Tenants and Leaseholders at the heart of our services

To meet our vision we strive to place tenants and leaseholders at the heart of our services as follows:

1. Customer Insight and personal choice
Knowing who are tenants and leaseholders are and what they want and need from our services allows us to provide tailored individual choices.
2. Community
Giving tenants and leaseholders the encouragement and opportunity to get involved in their community, to improve their area as a place to live, generate community spirit and improve their quality of life.
3. Improving Services
Giving tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to challenge, scrutinise, shape and improve the services that we provide.

To underpin the successful delivery of our tenants and leaseholders involvement strategy we will provide:

4. Training, Support and communication

Providing tenants and leaseholders with the skills, support and information to improve their community and our services as well as providing a stepping stone into wider training and employment.

Our approach to Involving our Tenants and Leaseholders in the services they receive and the communities where they live provides a chance for local people to directly influence their day to day lives and supports the wider principles of the ‘Big Society’.

The sections on the following pages provide more detail in these areas.

Our commitment to tenant and leaseholder involvement

Southampton City Council is committed to offering and supporting opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to get involved. We have:

1. A dedicated tenants and leaseholders involvement team, which oversees the delivery of this strategy and our approach to involvement.

We aim to:

- offer a wide range of options which enable tenants and leaseholders to get involved as much as they want to, and in ways that suit them;
 - empower tenants and leaseholders to make a difference to the services they receive, and in their local communities;
 - spread good news stories about successful involvement, which in turn will encourage others to get involved;
 - offer tenants and leaseholders genuine opportunities to scrutinise and challenge our performance against standards; and
 - evaluate the impact of tenants and leaseholders involvement both to the business and to tenants and leaseholders, in terms of value for money and other benefits.
2. A dedicated annual budget for involvement, spent on the following and agreed with the Federation of Southampton Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations:
 - Grants to residents’ groups;
 - Training for tenants and leaseholders;
 - Attendance at conferences;
 - Publicity;

- Travel for staff, tenants and leaseholders to attend meetings, conferences and training; and
 - Childcare costs to enable attendance at involvement activities.
3. A staff wide commitment to involving tenants and leaseholders which means we will ensure:
- tenant and leaseholder involvement is part of everyone’s job, included in all job descriptions, and discussed at one to one and appraisal;
 - induction for new staff covers the importance and benefits of working together with tenants and leaseholders;
 - every member of staff has training on tenant and leaseholder involvement, and is signed up to the strategy;
 - staff are encouraged to be creative and imaginative in the ways that they involve tenants and leaseholders;
 - staff are regularly updated on tenant and leaseholder involvement successes; and
 - staff are given support and resources for any additional time required to undertake tenants and leaseholders involvement activities.
4. A dedicated tenant and leaseholder resource centre which includes a meeting room, computer facilities, photocopying and an access point for information.

Our commitment to involvement has shaped this guide and the actions we are taking to further improve opportunities for residents.

While this strategy refers to tenants and leaseholders, it also applies on a wider basis to people who may be our customers or may be involved with the service at different times and under different circumstances, such as owner occupiers and private tenants living on estates where improvement programmes are taking place, applicants on the Housing waiting list and well as customers of other services such as our Community Alarm Service.

Customer insight and personal choice

Knowing our customers and better household profiling.

We work hard to gather and analyse information about our tenants and leaseholders with the help of our I-World and MOSAIC systems. We aim to have a clearer idea of who our tenants and leaseholders are and what they want and need, and we will offer choices that will be relevant to them, and move towards offering more tailored services.

Diversity

We are committed to ensuring that no individual or group faces barriers to becoming involved or is discriminated against.

We recognise though, that some residents will choose not get involved, which we accept and respect.

We know that some groups are under-represented and we will continue to look for new and appropriate ways of encouraging their involvement.

One of our Tenants Association in St Marys organised a street party for local residents during the summer. There was homemade food, organised and improvised games and music. This was very successful in encouraging residents from different backgrounds to meet one another.

As a result the TA and the Council got to know the Somali community in that area better. By chatting informally we found that they wanted to know more about the repairs service and other Council services. We also discovered that they were not keen on meetings but would appreciate informal relaxed get-togethers, which means we can now offer this community more appropriate ways of getting involved. We will learn from experiences like this in developing new ways for residents to get involved.

Providing customer choice

We offer choices of colours and finishes when we install Decent Homes kitchens and bathrooms. We offer many different ways to pay rent, and provide a range of options on how we can be contacted for example face to face, letter, phone or text. We offer choice through the Homebid and mutual exchange systems and the option for residents to buy their home.

We know that our customers like choice, because it makes the service feel that bit more personal. However there will be some areas where we can't offer choices and in these cases we will present this honestly and clearly. We are committed to providing information on choices available, finding out where tenants and leaseholders would like greater choice, and improving the range of choices we offer.

Improving your home

We are committed to improving homes and neighbourhoods. We will continue to consult on priorities for maintenance and improvement spending over the next few years and beyond.

We already contact tenants and leaseholders through a variety of ways including personal visits, drop-in events, questionnaires, tenants groups, tenant reps and conferences but we will continue to look at new ways of ensuring that tenants and leaseholders can influence how we improve homes.

Community

Opportunities for improving where you live

Decent neighbourhoods

We are committed to delivering our Decent Neighbourhoods standard as we carry out large scale work to improve the open spaces in and around our estates. The priorities for the Decent Neighbourhoods agenda are:

- Create decent neighbourhoods in which people are happy to live.
- Deliver a programme of transformational projects to improve the appearance of our estates.
- Develop, nurture and sustain a sense of pride and local identity through resident involvement.

We are continually looking to improve our Neighbourhoods by working with our tenants to create communities and areas that they feel proud of, working with tenants and leaseholders from the word go on ideas, designs and materials.

The Council aims to create balanced and sustainable communities. We believe that physical improvements can have a huge impact on the community and the quality of life for residents, and that individual residents getting involved in this process can be the spur to higher levels of involvement across a whole community.

We will increase the opportunities for tenants and leaseholders working on Decent Neighbourhoods in different areas of the city to share their ideas and experiences so that we can learn from these as schemes move across the city.

In Tankerville Road, Woolston tenants told us about an open piece of land that was under used and abused. The area will be landscaped, creating play areas, natural grown habitats and planters in the shape of ships sails, which pick up on the area's nautical history. Local artists will create engraved plaques that illustrate the history of the site.

Residents told us of a problem at International Way, Weston where the strong coastal winds created wind tunnels around the tower block entrances, and made getting in and out of the flats difficult. This is one of the many issues being dealt with by Decent Neighbourhoods work at International Way. The solution is placing large sculptures around the main entrances to act as windbreaks and lift the appearance of the area. New hard and soft landscaping and play opportunities are also planned as part of a huge scheme covering the area around the 6 tower blocks.

Estate Regeneration

We will involve tenants and leaseholders in our estate regeneration schemes, offering opportunities to comment on and influence what facilities are available in the areas, and to become involved through public consultation in the choice of scheme from those submitted through the tendering process.

When proposals were being developed for regeneration of the Hinkler Parade area in Thornhill, residents were adamant that they needed to keep a post office both during and after the development, as they viewed this as an essential local facility. The council responded and arrangements have been made for the post office to be retained on a temporary basis during the development, and it will move permanently into the new development on completion. The dentist has also been moved within the local area due to lobbying from residents who wanted continued easy access to this facility.

Estate Improvement Programme

We will set aside a budget specifically to tackle smaller issues raised by tenants and leaseholders in their areas. In this way tenants and leaseholders are able to have an immediate and direct effect on the appearance of the area, getting rid of small scale ‘eye sores’, brightening up the neighbourhoods, and making a real physical difference.

Estate Inspections

We will offer the opportunity to tenants and leaseholders to accompany housing and other staff around their estate, identifying problems and monitoring the service. We will also support tenants and leaseholders to carry out their own inspections, and will act on problems they identify that need following up.

We will publish details in advance, and aim to feed back on the outcomes of inspections in a way that suits the tenants in that area. Estate Inspections are an important tool in ensuring estates are well maintained and identifying improvements tenants and leaseholders want to see.

We are committed to developing a new process which will assist staff, tenants and leaseholders to ‘grade’ the appearance of estates across the city more consistently, and to monitor improvements. We are sharing this process with other housing providers and other council departments, bringing together services working in an area with the aim of striving constantly to improve the environment our tenants and leaseholders live in.

We will also continue to develop Patch Chats where tenants and leaseholders are able to meet regularly with housing staff, other council staff and representatives from other organisations (such as the police) who provide a service on the estate. This aims to ensure that both tenants and leaseholders and service providers are better informed and able to work together to monitor and improve a range of local services.

Opportunities for young people to get involved – Junior wardens

We recognise that young people are our customers too and some will become our tenants of the future. They play a key role in helping us to look after our estates. We want to make sure that young people are fully engaged in improving our neighbourhoods and services. We will continue to develop the Junior Neighbourhood Warden Scheme and look for creative and appropriate ways and opportunities for young people to comment on and influence our service.

Estate Plans

We will use our knowledge of our tenants and leaseholders and their priorities to work with them and develop plans for each of our estates. The plans will cover issues tenants and leaseholders think are important and will guide how we use resources in short and long term projects. They will help us to develop a comprehensive approach to improving our estates, working with tenants and leaseholders and other agencies to lift the appearance of areas, and encourage involvement of the community.

Neighbourhood Watch

We will promote, encourage and support the setting up of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. Neighbourhood Watch can help tenants and leaseholders to feel safer in their neighbourhoods, knowing that there is a network of support.

Bringing in extra money – grant aid to community groups

We will support residents' groups and individuals to apply for grants that are available for community activities and projects, increasing the range and scale of improvements they are able to make in their communities. Applying for grants can be complicated and time consuming but we are committed to developing skills of our staff, tenants and leaseholders to make the most of the opportunities available.

Southampton tenants have had great success in recent years, from obtaining money for computer equipment and newsletters, to receiving over £100,000 for a multi use play area at Holyrood.

At Wyndham Court and Albion Towers tenants identified unused pieces of local land and with grant funding have landscaped the areas and put in garden and play equipment. These areas have now become popular relaxation and meeting areas, bringing the community together.

Working with others

Community groups

We will support local groups, Tenants and Residents Associations, Block and Street reps, Neighbourhood Watch, social clubs and so on, who all help to bring the community together.

When residents work together, community spirit develops and areas improve. We will promote this, helping and supporting the set up and running of Tenants and Residents Associations and encouraging them to represent the views of their communities and make a difference in their areas.

Block & Street Reps represent the views of tenants and leaseholders living in a small defined area. We are committed to supporting them, and encouraging them to be a link between the Council and local tenants and leaseholders, so that we can hear and respond to local views. Block Reps play a key role in helping to develop community spirit in their areas, sometimes arranging residents' get togethers and social occasions. They also help to make sure the area is well maintained by doing walkabouts and reporting repairs.

Federation of Southampton Tenants' and Residents' Associations

'The Federation' supports groups across the city and works with the Council to improve the housing service. We will develop the Federation's key role in scrutinising the service tenants and leaseholders receive and challenging performance.

Communities of interest – for example Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, Sheltered Housing Forum

We recognise that different groups and communities of residents may wish to become involved in different ways. We are committed to developing imaginative and wide ranging involvement opportunities that encourage under represented groups to work with us.

The Albion Towers Tenants' Association and the local housing office noticed a large Somali community living in the block. With the help of the Tenant Involvement Unit, they set up a Somali Women's Group where they also provide translators and council officers talk with the tenants about issues regarding the block.

Activities for older people

We have two Activity Coordinator posts who work across Supported Housing schemes in the city to help set up and support a wide range of activities for residents to reduce social isolation and improve residents' health and well being.

The Coordinators have supported a group of residents in Sholing to form the Twilight Club, create a committee, and apply for £1000 in grants. This has brought residents together, enabled them to use skills they had forgotten they possessed, and to have a huge sense of achievement. Members are now joining in with other activities in the area.

Everyone Sings, a joint project with the music service where young and old get together to sing has had amazing results. Residents who were previously isolated are joining in. One resident with mild dementia now has an electric organ in her flat, provided by her family, and sings daily. There are numerous examples of this project making a real difference to the quality of life, and the health and wellbeing, of residents

Improving Services

Shape and improve

Capital Group

This group works with us to shape priorities for capital spending. We are committed to developing the experience of the group to enable them to make a greater contribution to the discussion around priorities, the choice of areas in which to commence capital works, and the selection and specification of products. In this way they will have a genuine influence on long term planning issues relating to the housing stock.

Specific service groups

We are committed to shaping service improvements based on the experience of our tenants and leaseholders, for example:

- **Leaseholder Forum**
This group enables leaseholders to get together with managers and staff, to share information and common concerns. We aim to develop the role of the group in influencing the service that leaseholders receive. Housing Quality Network will be carrying out a health check on our leaseholder services and will hold a focus group with the Leaseholder Forum, to enable their input, as expert service users, and allow them to influence resulting service improvements.
- **Rent Focus Group**
This tenants' group looks at new ideas for improving rent collection and reducing arrears. They helped shape the style and design of new 'traffic light' letters which are now used in the rent arrears process. Since the introduction of these eye catching letters with information boxes providing advice and contact points, response rates have increased by 10%, which equates to an additional 60 customers per week contacting us for help. The group was involved in the decision to move one of the rent free weeks from March to August, and, following research into good practice, they recommended changes to our internet site which have now been implemented, making it easier to navigate, with more advice about ways to pay rent, and links to welfare rights information.
- **Sheltered Housing Forum**
This well attended and popular forum is consulted on the services received by residents living in our supported housing, and also informed about the wider issues that affect tenants across the city. The Sheltered Housing Forum were instrumental in the decision to establish 2 Activity Coordinator posts in the new Supported Housing structure, feeding back the strong view that residents valued social activities, and that the continuation and expansion of these was vital to reduce social exclusion.

- Void Focus Group
This group helped shape and agree the Moving in and Moving out standards which state clearly what we expect tenants to do before they give up their tenancy, and have become the baseline for the work we do in our empty properties

Policy and procedure reviews

We will, as we undertake our ongoing programme of policy and procedure review, involve groups of tenants and leaseholders to look with us at our processes, to ensure that our procedures are fit for purpose, and to ensure that residents receive the kind of service they want. We currently have a group of tenants and leaseholders working on and trialling a new estate inspection procedure.

Service standards

We will involve tenants and leaseholders in defining the level of service they want, and agreeing how we will monitor and report on our progress and performance and review the standards on an ongoing basis.

Representatives from the Federation have been involved in the pilot to develop a County wide standard for Tenant Involvement and Empowerment as part of the Hampshire and District Residents' Forum. This Forum aims to ensure all tenants in the county have the opportunity to get more involved.

Handling Complaints

We aim to provide high quality services, and are delighted to hear from our customers when they feel we have done a good job. However we also want them to tell us if they think we have let them down so that we can put things right and improve our service for the future. These principles are contained in our compliments, comments and complaints policy. We are committed to learning from complaints made and using feedback to improve our services. We will develop ways of informing residents how their views have made a difference. We will also look at ways of involving tenants and leaseholders in helping us resolve difficult complaints.

Customer Excellence Awards

We actively encourage our tenants and leaseholders to nominate staff who they feel have offered an excellent service into the Council award scheme. We also actively support National Customer Service week each year which includes our managers taking time out to spend time with our teams who work directly with residents to help support a better understanding of how our services can be developed to improve service to our tenants and leaseholders.

Challenge and scrutinise

Tenant Inspectors

We are proud of our highly trained and professional Tenant Inspectors who have worked hard to look in depth at service areas decided by tenants. The Inspectors assess our performance, comment on policies and procedures, and make recommendations for improvement. Inspectors will interview staff and tenants, carry out surveys and mystery shopping to enable them to get a well rounded picture of the service they are looking at.

After each of the inspections carried out (voids and ASB so far) we discuss the Inspectors' recommendations with them and in each case we have altered our policy, procedure, and approach, to take these on board. This is a real success story and a vital mechanism for tenants to have a genuine influence on the services they receive.

The inspection of the Antisocial Behaviour service led to specific standards being incorporated into the new policy and procedure. The Inspectors made 13 recommendations, which were all accepted. Their influence means that there is now a commitment for an action plan to be drawn up in every case between the complainant and the housing officer, and for regular contact and review. This will make a real difference to the quality of our ASB service.

Scrutiny of our performance and services

We recognise the need to offer tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to scrutinise what we do more closely, to challenge the level and nature of the services they receive. Only with this kind of involvement can we be sure that we are providing the kind of service tenants and leaseholders want and need. We will develop the scrutiny and performance role to enable tenants and leaseholders to look in detail at our performance. This will ultimately improve the housing service and make it more accountable.

Our tenants and leaseholders have the right to expect that we will use resources wisely and deliver the best value for money services that we can. We are committed to assessing the value for money of our services. This will include comparing ourselves against other Housing providers and looking at and learning from best practice. We will also look for creative and inventive ways to deliver efficient services that meet needs. We will share financial information with our tenants and leaseholders at our annual Winter Conferences so that they are able to comment on and influence spending proposals.

Contractor Selection.

When carrying out major programmes of work on the estates, we are committed to involving tenants and leaseholders, who we believe know most about the needs of their area, in helping us choose the right contractor. We have involved residents in selecting contractors for our Better Neighbourhoods, Estate Regeneration, and Digital TV projects.

Residents who were involved with Better Neighbourhoods on an ongoing basis, as members of the communications group, were instrumental in getting steps and handrails installed in a number of locations across the estate. Living locally, they were aware of the needs of some residents with disabilities, which had not been picked up in the general consultation process. In the same scheme, proposals for the location of play facilities were changed following input from residents, and their involvement led directly to the installation of CCTV to monitor an area where it was feared ASB would be a problem.

Impact assessment

We will continue to develop our impact assessment process for resident involvement, to identify the outcomes of tenant involvement activities, and assess what we have achieved for the resources put in.

We are restructuring our Capital Group having determined that splitting it into 3 sub groups has needed a greater input of time and resources for little benefit. Residents and officers have agreed that combining the 3 groups into one is a more efficient and cost effective approach

Annual report

We will work with tenants and leaseholders to produce an annual report that provides an update on the services we provide, our progress in delivering against our commitments and outlining our further improvement plans. We will use the annual report to obtain feedback from our tenants and leaseholders on our services and the future priorities.

Cabinet Member Questions

Our tenants and leaseholders value access to people who make decisions. The Question Time meeting with the Cabinet Member gives them the opportunity to have a direct voice to influence strategic and operational decisions.

Training, Support and Communication

Training

We believe in investing in training for residents who are keen to get involved, to enable them to develop a wide range of skills and to support them in making a difference.

A group of residents helps us to carry out a skills audit and plan an exciting and varied programme of training. The huge range of courses available includes:

- Communications training;
- Effective meetings;
- Anti-social behaviour;
- Participatory budgeting;
- Working as a team; and
- Tenant inspector training.

From face painting to presentation and committee skills, our tenants find that the courses not only assist them with involvement in the housing service and in their community but help in other areas of their lives. In line with our worklessness project, we are particularly keen to help our tenants and leaseholders design and use the training available as a route into further training or employment.

When tenants have attended training, we encourage them to share their feedback with others which can also help develop confidence and presentation skills.

Some of our tenants and leaseholders who have attended training courses have reported the following:

‘The training has given me the confidence to volunteer for the Sports Development Team. I even manned the desk at the Sports Relief event, something I wouldn’t have dreamt of doing in the past. I work in retail and now feel much more confident when I have to deal with difficult people.’

‘I’ve set up football coaching sessions, we’re working on a community garden project and we’ve developed our own website. I would not have had the confidence to get up and do all these things before.’

‘I’ve completed an Open University course in Art History. This is something I never dreamt I could do. The training enabled me to feel more in control of my life.’

‘The training I’ve received has benefitted the whole community. We’ve just heard that we have been awarded £100,000 which is brilliant news.’

Links to other providers

We work closely with other local Housing Providers to provide joint training events (South Coast Training) and this gives opportunities to meet other tenants from around Hampshire.

We organise study visits to other housing organisations.

In addition to running local training events we also enable residents to attend nationwide conferences, seminars and workshops

Support

Financial support

We ensure that no tenant is ‘out of pocket’ when attending events run by Housing Services.

We support Tenants Associations to cover their day-to day running costs.

We provide allowances to contribute towards the cost of childcare and to cover transport costs to enable people to attend meetings.

Support for groups and individuals

SCC provides a Tenants Resource Centre, which includes a meeting room, library, photocopier, and computer with internet access. These are available for all tenants to use, free of charge, for tenant involvement activities. Facilities can be used out of normal office hours, as long as a booking is made beforehand.

Tenant Involvement Officers are always on hand to help tenants get the most out of becoming a rep.. TIO’s can advise on events, meetings and training and help tenants find the events and activities most suitable for their interests.

Obtaining external funding

SCC has a successful track record of encouraging individuals and groups to apply for external funding. This may be, for example, for communal area improvements, social activities and community development. The Tenant Involvement team and Business Support teams will support groups to make applications. We are also on hand to help put project plans in place and see them through.

Dispute resolution

The Tenant Involvement Unit offers a number of training courses to help tenants’ groups run smoothly. This includes how to chair a meeting, writing codes on conduct, assertiveness, bullying and confidence building. The TIO can assist with disputes within a residents’ group or can bring in independent mediators such as New Forest Mediation or TPAS if necessary.

The Council has also formally adopted a code of conduct which applies to all involvement activities and this aims to ensure all tenants and leaseholders have an equal and fair opportunity to be

involved. This is included at appendix 1. The Council also has a formal complaints procedure that can be pursued.

Standard documents

The TPU provides copies of standard constitutions, codes of conduct and other documents useful for setting up and running a Tenants Group.

External support

There are local and national support organisations available to our involved residents. Southampton Voluntary Services will help with grant applications. TPAS or TAROE (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England) can be contacted for their advice and expertise on resident involvement. The ‘useful links’ section on page 22 has contact details of a number of organisations from across the country.

Our residents benefit from membership of TPAS, which broadens the range of training available, and means we are able to engage experts to come and work with our residents on specific issues.

TPAS have been working with the new committee of the Federation of Southampton Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations to develop their skills, and ethos, and to produce an action plan for the year’s activities.

Tenant Mentors

We are developing the role of some of our residents as Tenant Mentors. Already experienced and successful in involvement in their own local areas, these tenants have agreed to work with and support other representatives and associations to give them the benefit of their experience and inspire them to make a difference.

Tenant Helpers

We are delighted and grateful to have a group of enthusiastic tenants and leaseholders who are willing to assist at events (conferences, training events etc) to welcome tenants, help with refreshments, organisation and admin. In addition to helping us and other tenants and leaseholders, we hope that the experience of becoming a helper will assist these tenants and leaseholders to develop new skills.

Valuing our involved tenants and leaseholders

We greatly value the time and effort that residents put into becoming involved and making a difference. We are committed to showing our appreciation in a variety of ways including running our annual Tenant Champion competition.

Communication

Website

The Tenant Involvement Unit has its own pages on the Southampton City Council website at www.southampton.gov.uk/tpu containing lots of information on the unit, the activities supported, and the ways of getting involved.

Tenants Link

Tenants' Link is Southampton City Council's quarterly magazine which is hand delivered to all our tenants and leaseholders. Tenants are on the editorial team and thereby have a huge influence on the stories promoted and the messages communicated to all our tenants and leaseholders. The magazine informs of new initiatives, existing and new policies and contains information about involvement activities. The magazine is also used as a consultation mechanism, with questionnaires, surveys and competitions. We actively encourage tenants and leaseholders to contribute by writing letters or articles about the activities of their groups and to spread the word about the good work they do, and the difference they have made in their communities. Tenants' Link has been shortlisted for the chartered Institute of Public Relations best magazine award 2010.

Tenants' Sounding Board

We have a database of over 600 tenants and leaseholders who have said that they would like to be involved one way or another, and constantly contact them for views and feedback, which then influence our decisions and services.

We will continue to encourage tenants from under-represented groups and areas to be involved. This includes tenants from areas where there are no tenants associations or Block/Street Reps, black and ethnic minority groups, young people and young families.

We will review our communication with Sounding Board members to ensure that we keep them up to date with all the initiatives and areas of the service that they could get involved in.

Facebook

Because we constantly seek to improve levels of involvement, and to offer tenants and leaseholders opportunities to be involved in a way that suits them, we have launched a Tenant Involvement Facebook page. We are committed to getting young people interested and involved in our service and we know that Facebook and social networking in general appeals to this age group. We want to use Facebook for information, and consultation exercises and will be guided by feedback from users to develop it in the most effective ways.

Feedback and evidence – ‘You said ... We did’

We will be accountable to our tenants and leaseholders. We will develop a ‘you said, we did’ mechanism to feed back, so that when people have commented and given us their views we are open about the action we have taken as a result, and they are able to see directly the difference that getting involved has made.

Resident conferences

We are committed to continuing to run our popular Winter Conference. This provides an opportunity to update attendees on housing news, performance, new policy initiatives and plans for the next year. The conference gives tenants the opportunity to discuss, challenge and contribute to these debates, and to influence strategic and financial decisions, such as the direction and priorities for our capital spending.

The conference format is constantly changing but is likely to involve a combination of guest speakers, presentations, group workshops, and information stands. Our interactive electronic voting system means that attendees can answer questions and vote on key issues and get immediate feedback on the views of the conference as a whole in relation to topics being discussed.

In addition to the Winter Conference we will run a summer Tenant Involvement event designed to encourage more tenants to get involved in shaping our service.

Monitoring and reviewing how we are doing

How we monitor progress

We need residents' help to monitor how we are doing. At the end of this guide there is an action plan which highlights our aims over the next 2 years. We will look at this regularly with residents to check on achievements. We are keen to make sure that the activities we undertake enable them to influence, change, and improve the service.

Impact of getting involved

We believe that resident involvement improves services and communities, and ensures that money is spent on things that are important to tenants and leaseholders.

We are committed to demonstrating how involvement has changed and improved the service, and hope that this will encourage even more tenants to get involved and make a difference.

Using various methods such as Newsletters, websites, tenant events and through tenant reps, we will look to share news of successes. We will also highlight areas we know we can improve on, and where we think we can achieve better value for money.

Working with other providers

Our aim is to provide the best service we can for our residents. To do this we need to work with other housing providers such as Housing Associations, to share ideas and resources.

Through South Coast Training we offer a wider range of training courses for our tenants at better value, where they can compare notes with tenants from other organisations.

Our tenants also have the opportunity to investigate how other local Housing Providers run their services and be able to compare our services against theirs.

We have developed local offers for Tenant Involvement and Empowerment through the Hampshire and District Residents' Forum. This group now has the scope to develop and is looking at developing a role which involves monitoring and reporting on the progress of the various organisations against the local offers, sharing good practice and publicising successes and good news stories.

We are working with Housing Associations in the city to develop a new, shared approach to estate inspections.

Review of the tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy

We will involve tenants and leaseholders regularly in the review of this strategy to ensure that we are making good progress and that our approach is still in tune with business requirements and the needs and aspirations of tenants and leaseholders.

The role of members

Elected Members are committed to working behalf of tenants and leaseholders for a better service. Elected Members are the wider communities’ representatives for the services provided by the Council. They are an invaluable resource to support local involvement and to represent the views of their constituents at a city wide level.

We will encourage members to have a role in supporting their local tenants and leaseholders through their local surgeries, walkabouts and other consultation processes and ensure that the views they represent are used to help to shape local services.

We will respond promptly to all enquiries raised by members on behalf of the local residents and involve local members in issues in their area.

We will help develop the role for members as the new guidance on the regulation of services to tenants is introduced.

Useful contacts

Tenant Participation Unit

Tenant Resource Centre
Southbrook Rise
4-8 Millbrook Road East
Southampton
SO15 1YG

Tel: 023 8083 3185

Email: tenant.participation@southampton.gov.uk

Web: www.southampton.gov.uk/tpu

Federation of Southampton's Tenant & Resident Associations

Tenants Federation Office
Ground Floor, Southbrook Rise
4-8 Millbrook Road East
Southampton
SO15 1YG

Tel: 023 8083 3024

Email: fostara@btconnect.com

Tenants Services Authority

Maple House
149 Tottenham Court Road
London
W1T 7BN

TSA Customer Service Team

2nd Floor
Lateral
8 City Walk
Leeds LS11 9AT

Tel: 0845 230 7000

Email: enquiries@tsa.gsx.gov.uk

Web: www.tenantservicesauthority.org

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Tel: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983

Email: advice@lgo.org.uk

Tenant Participatory Advisory Service

TPAS Ltd,
5th Floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road,
Manchester,
M32 0RS

Tel: 0161 868 3500

Email: info@tpas.org.uk

Web: www.tpas.org.uk

Tenant and Residents Organisations of England

TAROE
Jackson House
2nd Avenue
Runcorn
WA7 2PD

Tel: (01928) 701001

Email: runcornoffice@taroe.org

Web: www.taroe.org

InStep

Phone: 0500 844 111

Email: info.instep@tribalgroupp.com

Southampton Voluntary Services (SVS)

The Voluntary Action Centre
Kingsland Square
St Mary Street
Southampton
SO14 1NW

Tel: 023 8022 8291

Email: information@southamptonvs.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

3 Kings Park Road
Southampton
Hampshire
SO15 2AT

Tel: 023 8022 1406 or 023 8033 3868

Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Action Plan

2 year action plan to develop specific areas of the service

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
1	<p>We will share with you on a regular basis examples of where tenant involvement has changed and improved the service and we will promote tenant successes.</p> <p>We will publish feedback on all major consultations via Tenants' Link, information leaflets and/or the councils website.</p> <p>Welcome to your new home pack including Tenant Involvement leaflet and Tenants' Link.</p>		Ongoing		
2	<p>We will highlight areas of our service we know we can improve on and where we think we can get better value for money.</p>		Ongoing		
3	<p>We will evaluate the impact of resident involvement both to the business and to residents, in terms of value for money and other benefits and share this information with tenants. (Impact assessments)</p>		Ongoing		
4	<p>We will offer tenants and leaseholders genuine opportunities to scrutinise and challenge our performance against our standards.</p> <p>This will include developing a mystery shopping programme</p>		6 months		

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
5	<p>We will ensure that an all of our staff are fully trained and committed to tenant involvement.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resident involvement will be included in all staff job descriptions; will be discussed at one to ones and appraisals. - We will ensure that all new staff receive an induction that covers the importance and benefits of working together with residents - We will involve tenants in staff induction explaining benefits of involvement. - Every member of staff will have training on resident involvement, and be signed up to the strategy - We will involve tenants in interviewing for key staff posts 		6 months		
6	<p>We will continue to look for new and appropriate ways of encouraging the involvement of under represented groups. In particular we will look for creative and appropriate ways and opportunities for young people to comment on and influence our service.</p> <p>We will investigate making our website more interactive.</p>		Ongoing		

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
7	<p>We aim to have a clearer idea of who our tenants and leaseholders are and what they want and need, and we will offer choices that will be relevant to them, and move towards offering more tailored services.</p> <p>We will increase the number of up to date phone numbers and email addresses we have for tenants, to increase our opportunities for consultation.</p>		Ongoing		
8	<p>We are committed to providing information on choices available, finding out where tenants and leaseholders would like greater choice and improving the range of choices we offer.</p>		1-2 years		
9	<p>Decent Neighbourhoods</p> <p>We will provide the opportunities for tenants and leaseholders working on Decent Neighbourhoods in different areas of the city to share their ideas and experiences so that we can learn from these as schemes move across the city.</p>	<p>Residents to have a greater pride and satisfaction of their neighbourhood as a place to live.</p> <p>Reduce ASB in an area</p>	Ongoing	Aidan Cooper	<p>Decent Neighbourhood Stakeholders Group set up. This meets every six months and updates residents of work happening, planned work and ideas and issues for future work. Next meeting is scheduled for 8th September 2011.</p> <p>Possible training requests include estate tours of recycling and good design examples.</p>

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
10	Estate Regeneration We will involve tenants and leaseholders in our estate regeneration schemes, offering opportunities to comment on and influence what facilities are available in the areas		Ongoing		
11	Estate Plans We will develop plans for each of our estates				
12	Patch chats We will continue to develop Patch Chats		Ongoing		
13	Capital Group We are committed to developing the experience of the group to enable them to make a greater contribution to the discussion around priorities, the choice of areas in which to commence capital works, and the selection and specification of products.		Ongoing		
14	We will continue to consult on priorities for maintenance and improvement spending over the next few years and beyond.				
15	We will support residents' groups and individuals to apply for grants that are available for community activities and projects		Ongoing		

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
16	<p>Federation of Southampton Tenants' and Residents' Associations</p> <p>We will develop the Federation's key role in scrutinising the service tenants and leaseholders receive and challenging performance.</p>		Ongoing		
17	<p>Neighbourhood Watch</p> <p>We will promote, encourage and support the setting up of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.</p>		1-2 years		
18	<p>Policy and procedure reviews</p> <p>We will, as we undertake our ongoing programme of policy and procedure review, involve groups of tenants and leaseholders to look with us at our processes.</p>		Ongoing		
19	<p>Service standards</p> <p>We will involve tenants and leaseholders in defining the level of service they want, and agreeing how we will monitor and report on our progress and performance and review the standards on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>We also aim to develop the role of the Leaseholder Forum in influencing the service that leaseholders receive.</p>				

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
20	<p>Handling complaints</p> <p>We will look at ways of involving tenants and leaseholders in helping us resolve difficult complaints.</p>				
21	<p>Encouraging feedback</p> <p>We will develop a “you said, we did” mechanism to feed back, so that when people have commented and given us their views we are open about the action we have taken as a result, and they are able to see directly the difference that getting involved has made.</p>				
22	<p>Customer Excellence Awards</p> <p>We will actively encourage our tenants and leaseholders to nominate staff who they feel have offered an excellent service into the Council award scheme.</p>		Ongoing		

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
23	<p>Scrutiny and value for money</p> <p>We will compare ourselves against other Housing providers and look and learn from best practice.</p> <p>We will also look for creative and inventive ways to deliver efficient services that meet needs. We will share financial information with our tenants and leaseholders at our annual Winter Conferences so that they are able to comment on and influence spending proposals.</p>				
24	<p>Training, personal development and helping people back into work</p> <p>We are particularly keen to help our tenants and leaseholders design and use the training available as a route into further training or employment.</p>				
25	<p>Dispute resolution</p> <p>We will update the Code of Conduct</p>				
26	<p>Tenant Mentors</p> <p>We need to evaluate how tenants experiences can best be shared</p>				
27	<p>Tenant Champions</p> <p>We will continue to run this annual competition.</p>				

	Actions	Outcomes	Timescales	Who	Update
28	Resident conferences We will run a winter conference				
29	Review of the strategy We will set up a group to help us monitor progress of the strategy.				
30	The role of members We will help develop the role for members as the new guidance on the regulation of services to tenants is introduced.				

Appendix 1 – Code of conduct (to be finalised)

Introduction

Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement is at the heart of the service that the Council provides and is integral to improving council services, communities and peoples' quality of life. The Council welcomes challenge and scrutiny in the way it provides its services to tenants as the best way to help improve services for all and is committed to the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing and the standards and principles which it promotes. The Council and its tenants and leaseholders should expect and receive a relationship which is built on trust, openness and honesty in all Involvement Activities. And whilst Tenants and the Council do not always agree the Council expects all involvement activity and the tenants and leaseholders involved to work in a spirit of partnership for the benefit of all tenants and leaseholders in Southampton.

This Code of Conduct (the 'Code') sets out the minimum standards of acceptable behaviour required during tenant and leaseholder meetings and other events and occasions when tenants and leaseholders are taking part in tenant/leaseholder Involvement Activities.

The Council is committed to working closely with tenants and leaseholders so we can tailor and improve our services in line with our customers' expectations. We want to encourage as many tenants and leaseholders as possible to help us improve our services and we need to ensure that residents are not faced with rudeness, offensive behaviour or intimidation while working with us, and each other.

This Code applies to tenants, leaseholders, residents, customers and officers whilst carrying out Involvement Activities in Southampton (or on behalf of Southampton City Council and its Tenants and Leaseholders) such as meetings, training events, consultation events and conferences.

1. Common Principles¹

- 1.1 All elements of the following Code apply equally to tenants, leaseholders, residents, customers and officers, hereafter referred to as participants, unless specifically noted.
- 1.2 Participants are required at all times to act in a courteous manner. Personal attacks, offensive and abusive comments are not acceptable.
- 1.3 In carrying out their role, no participant will discriminate against any person in a manner that is contrary to the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy. All participants shall acknowledge that everybody has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of ethnic or national

¹ *These principals apply to all Tenant Involvement activities including all non-meeting based activities*

origins, disability, gender, marital status, age, sexuality, religion or any other matter which causes people to be treated with injustice.

- 1.4 Participants must consider the Council’s obligation, under Health and Safety and other legislation, to ensure the effective operation of the groups and consultation processes and its duty to protect residents, councillors and members of staff from verbal, physical abuse or harassment.
- 1.5 Participants must declare an interest if they have any personal, financial or material interest in any matter being considered. This may result in a participant being required to leave the meeting while those items relating to the matter in which the participant has an interest are discussed.
- 1.6 At meetings, all participants shall at all times operate within the rules laid down in the constitution or Terms of reference of the group at which they are attending. It is therefore in the interest of all groups to have at hand a copy of their constitution or ToR at all meetings for reference if required.

2. Officers’ code

- 2.1 At all times, officers shall act in a professional manner and shall treat representatives with courtesy and respect.
- 2.2 Officers shall use their best endeavours to make themselves available to meet representatives providing reasonable notice is given and demands are not excessive.
- 2.3 Officers shall, with reasonable notice, supply information to residents’ representatives regarding the delivery of housing services. This will not include information relating to individual tenants (except at that individual’s request and with their written consent) or to staff which is confidential.
- 2.4 We are committed to being open and transparent but there may occasionally be some financial details of a confidential nature which we are not able to provide.
- 2.5 Reasonable notice will be deemed to be at least 14 working days unless there has been agreed negotiation for any particular meetings/information request.
- 2.6 Officers shall not provide more favourable treatment to residents’ representatives in relation to the provision of their housing services, nor shall they be treated any less favourably.

3. Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ and Residents’ Reps Code

- 3.1 Tenant and leaseholder representatives shall be courteous at all times in their dealings with each other, officers, councillors, contractors, agencies, other residents and members of the public.

- 3.2 Tenants and leaseholders representatives are responsible for representing the best interests of residents in their area/estate. They should try and reflect and understand the views of the community.
- 3.3 If tenants and leaseholders are representing a group, it is their responsibility to represent the views of that group and to feedback to their parent group.
- 3.4 Officers shall not be asked for their personal views about the policies, management, staff or elected councillors of the Council.
- 3.5 Tenants and leaseholders must respect the impartiality of officers and must undertake not to make political statements of a derogatory nature at meetings or in their role as a residents' representative.
- 3.6 From time to time, tenants and leaseholders will acquire and have access to confidential information and information that has not yet been made public. When tenants and leaseholders are advised that information is confidential or where it is clear by the nature of the information or the purpose of the meeting that it is confidential, it must not be disclosed to other people under any circumstances. This also includes discussions outside of the meeting(s) or with any participants' partners or family/friends. There may also be a requirement to sign an agreement that such information will not be disclosed. Such information must not be used for personal gain.
- 3.7 Participants shall respect all individuals' confidentiality, whether present or not, and should not mention specific individual cases in public meetings which may cause embarrassment to or identification of an individual.

4. Conduct at meetings

- 4.1 In addition to the above common principles and codes, conduct at all meetings will be expected to meet the following standards. Groups will of course be able to introduce and agree additional standards as they feel appropriate, provided they meet the Council's core standards.
- 4.2 The meeting standards are:-
 - Participants should be courteous to each other at all times
 - Participants should go through the Chair before speaking
 - Participants should respect the role and follow the guidance of the Chair
 - Abusive or racist language is not acceptable and can be defined by any language or behaviour which the recipient considers to be abusive or racist.
 - Participants should allow each other to speak and be heard; only one person to speak at a time

- Keep to the subject, stay relevant and keep to the point

4.3 If a participant does not abide by the Code the Chair has the power to ask the participant to leave the meeting. For more information relating to Breach of the Code, please refer to Section 10.

5. The use of the Tenants Resource Centre (TRC)

5.1 The TRC includes the tenants meeting room, computer suite, photocopier, library and kitchen area.

5.2 The TRC is managed by the Tenant Participation Unit (TPU) and all users are requested to obtain guidelines for using these rooms, and the facilities and equipment before using them. Any work carried out in the TRC should be related to Tenant Involvement activities. Any abuse of the services provided will result in the removal of that service to the individual or group concerned.

5.3 The Tenant’s Resource Centre meeting room operates on a booking system and is booked through the TPU on a ‘first come first served’ basis.

5.4 Residents wanting to use the TRC facilities must:

- Ensure that the TRC meeting room and facilities outside the room are left in a clean and tidy condition after use, including washing and tidying away cups and crockery etc
- Ensure that no equipment within the TRC is removed without the consent of the TPU
- Ensure that any personal items are not left behind in the TRC
- Ensure that they are familiar with the fire procedures for the TRC

6. The Tenants Federation Office

6.1 This office is provided by the council for the use of the Tenants Federation committee. The Committee are responsible for access arrangements to their room, equipment, all documents and personal effects in their office while allowing SCC access as required for maintenance, cleaning, health and safety considerations etc

6.2 This office should only be used for involvement activities connected with the work of the Federation on behalf of tenants and should not be used for private matters or anything which might bring the council into disrepute.

7. Tenants group and tenants reps contact with the Media

7.1 There should be only one designated media contact for each tenant group/body.

- 7.2 When dealing with the media, the designated media contact must make it clear who they represent and have the agreement of that group/body before expressing any views.
- 7.3 Any participant who wishes to express their own individual views must make it clear that the view being expressed is the participant's own view and not that of any group/body.
- 7.4 Tenants groups and reps can seek advice from the Council's Communications Team if they would like assistance before making any statement to the media.
- 7.5 We recommend that all statements to the media should be in written format to ensure that an audit trail is available, and should be made by email wherever possible.
- 7.6 Training can be provided for contact with the media, press releases and publicity
- 7.7 Information given to the media:–
 - Should not identify any individual or enable any identification of any individual unless that person has consented to their identification
 - Must be factual and must not be party political.

8. Political affiliation

- 8.1 Individual participant members may be affiliated to or be members of a political party but may not represent a political party in their role as participant of the group.
- 8.2 No party political references should be made during meetings.
- 8.3 In line with the Council's requirements for Councillors seeking election, any tenant or leaseholder participant standing for the position of Elected Member or Member of Parliament will be required to withdraw from all Tenant Involvement positions and activities during the period leading up to elections (commonly known as purdah)
- 8.4 Any information to which a tenant or leaseholder has had access to as part of their involvement must not be used as the basis for any form of political activity, lobby or canvassing without the express permission of the Head of Housing or Solicitor to the Council.

9. Tenants and leaseholders and legal disputes with the Council

- 9.1 The Council reserves the right to cease working with any participant (or associated group) who is involved in a legal dispute with the Council.
- 9.2 Participants must not use Involvement Activities or Council resources to actively pursue any legal dispute with the Council.

10. Breaches of Code of Conduct

10.1 It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that all Tenants and Leaseholders have the same rights to take part in involvement activities and that all activities and participants adhere to the Code of Conduct. Should any participant breach the Code of Conduct and formal action is needed under the Code to address the behaviour it will be the Council's responsibility to bring this matter to their attention and to address as necessary.

10.2 Such action may include but is not limited to:

- Verbal or written warning;
- Removal from a specific meeting
- Time limited suspension on participation in certain activity or group(s)
- Exclusion from certain activities.

10.3 Council run meetings

10.3.1 At meetings run and/or chaired by the Council, should there be a breach of this Code, the Chair of the meeting will be responsible for addressing any breach. The Chair may seek advice from the Customer Involvement Manager as necessary.

10.3.2 Tenants and leaseholders may appeal against such a decision; See Appeals Process - Section 11.

10.4 Tenant and Leaseholder run meetings or activities

10.4.1 Tenant run groups such as Tenant Associations or other tenant involvement groups are expected to address any breaches of this Code of Conduct informally themselves.

10.4.2 Should the Chair of a Tenant/Leaseholder run meeting or activity, fail to address a breach of this Code, Officers and Councillors may refer to this Code and reserve the right to withdraw from the meeting or activity.

10.4.3 Should the Tenant/Leaseholder group wish to place a suspension or exclusion on any member of their group for breaches of the Code then they are required to provide any evidence they wish to use to support their recommendation to the Customer Involvement Manager in the TPU who will be responsible for confirming the decision of the Council. Any decision to suspend or exclude any tenant or leaseholder will be outlined in writing within 14 days of receipt of all information.

10.4.4 Tenants and leaseholders may appeal against such a decision; See Appeals Process - Section 11.

10.5 General breaches of conduct

10.5.1 The Council may withdraw recognition, support, resources and financial assistance to any tenants' group or individual who fails to adhere to the principles of the Code.

- 10.5.2 Any breaches of the Code, outside of meetings, may also result in an individual’s exclusion from Tenant Involvement Activities.
- 10.5.3 If appropriate, the Council may take reasonable steps to deal with disruptive or discourteous behaviour detrimental to the effective operation of any Tenant Involvement Group or activity(s) including restricting access to meetings or contact with officers and councillors.
- 10.5.4 Tenants and leaseholders may also face restrictions or exclusions if they bring the Tenants movement into disrepute. Some examples of this include:
- Misuse of funds;
 - Misuse or inappropriate use of resources including photocopiers, phones, Fax machines and IT equipment;
 - Being the recipient of or the cause of service of a Notice of Seeking Possession or Notice Before Proceedings for a Demotion Order for anti social behaviour.
 - Being the subject of an Anti-Social Behaviour Order or an injunction ;
 - Being convicted of an offence which would bring the tenants movement into disrepute.
- 10.6 In some instances it may be appropriate to try and resolve disputes by mediation and where appropriate this will be offered.
- 10.7 The Tenant Participation Unit (TPU) will be the responsible body for administering any restrictions or exclusions of individuals or groups from the Council’s Tenant Involvement Activities.

11. Appeals process

- 11.1 If an individual or group is not satisfied with the Council’s decision to withdraw recognition, support and financial assistance to a group or restrict or to exclude an individual from tenant involvement activities then they may appeal through the Council’s formal Customer Complaints Procedure.
- 11.2 The appellant may seek independent advice but it is expected that they do not seek any external methods of appeal until the corporate complaints process has been fully completed.