

# **Gateshead Council - Resident Influence Strategy**

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## **1. Introduction**

In November 2020 after widely consulting with tenants and stakeholders and receiving strong support, the Council made the decision to bring all Housing services together within the Council from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. One of the key messages that came from the customer consultation was how important it is that tenants and leaseholders can influence decisions, shape policies and recommend service improvements. The Council recognises and supports this, and a resident influence strategy has been developed to deliver on that commitment.

In terms of national context, the strategy will also underpin and support the Council in responding to the challenges and requirements of the Social Housing White Paper. It will help to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (one of the 4 Consumer Standards of the social housing regulatory framework).

Proposals within the Building Safety Bill will put in place a new and enhanced regulatory regime for building safety. It includes a requirement to ensure residents have a stronger voice and role and that we develop and resource a resident engagement strategy.

## **2. Gateshead in context**

The borough of Gateshead is the largest of the five Tyne and Wear authorities and comprises of a mix of both urban hubs and rural areas with smaller settlements. Poverty and health inequalities are placing an increasing demand on the services we provide, so we need more than ever to focus our work and the money we have to spend on what matters most. We want to help our communities not just survive, but to thrive.

The Council's Thrive agenda recognises Housing as a key determinant in the health and wellbeing of our communities and individual residents. In Gateshead 50% of housing is owner occupied, and 20% is managed by Gateshead Council. 23% of housing is rented from a private landlord or letting agency and 7% from a registered social landlord (Gateshead Council, May 2019).

Through the impact of right to buy and new housing developments, the tenure mix of what were once Council owned single tenure estates is changing. These estates are now often a mix of tenures including homeowners, leaseholders, private rented households as well as Council tenants. Issues that are important to Council tenants can also impact on other residents such as the maintenance of open spaces and anti-social behaviour.

Whilst the Council has a unique relationship with its tenants, a legal one that is subject to regulation it also recognises the importance of engaging with the wider community. It is therefore important that we provide opportunities for all residents to provide feedback and have influence on the delivery of services that may affect the whole community.

### **3. Future Housing Vision**

#### **Investing in homes and communities**

Gateshead Council is committed to investing in Council homes and communities around them including the management and maintenance of open spaces. The Council aims to invest £104 million in Council homes over the next four years. To deliver on this commitment we will work with customers, employees and stakeholders to develop and steer our investment programme.

#### **Improving services that matter most**

It is clear from what tenants and leaseholders have told us that they want the Council to improve the services that matter most to them and this will be our focus going forward. To achieve this, we need to ensure we have a wide range of feedback and influencing opportunities available for residents and this strategy sets out how we will achieve this.

### **4. Developing our approach to resident influence**

Whilst acknowledging the positive work with tenants and leaseholders undertaken by the Housing Company the Council recognised that it was important to carry out a significant reengineering of engagement to optimise resident feedback and ensure it

has a voice within the Council. The expectations of the Social Housing White paper, the existing and future regulatory requirements also mean that we have to future proof our approach.

To deliver on this the Council commissioned TPAS, a not for profit national organisation that is recognised as experts in this area to work with the Council and its tenants to develop a new resident influence strategy. The findings and recommendations from this project have informed this strategy and the actions that will result from it.

## **5. Four principles of capturing the customer experience**

The four principles that inform this strategy include; the role of Leadership; Everyone; Listening and Process.

### **Leadership**

- Informal individual opportunities – e.g. having a chat with a resident and acting on what was heard, receiving a complaint or compliment and acting on what is being said and acting in response to local or community level insight.
- Operational and procedural – e.g. routinely analysing outcomes of resident influence to understand impact & building this approach into process, proactively analysing transactional & qualitative insights & data and noticing what is happening in the non-vocalised resident experience – making changes & reporting and Actively seeking out the experiences of constituted groups .
- Strategic leadership opportunities – e.g. routinely reporting on resident influence outcomes, with particular attention to how services were affected and being transparent about resident influence on decisions in reports to the Executive Management Team and Strategic Housing Board

### **Everyone**

- Individual – being on the lookout for opportunities to learn more about the resident experience & seek time to network, undergo training and to challenge and discussing influencing opportunities and approaches when in conversation with residents
- Operational and procedural - Proactively seeking out experiences of a broad range of residents, including non-involved residents through targeted work, Providing the right resources, training & support as a matter of routine (staff & residents), including in recruitment, induction and appraisals. Understanding whether different groups of resident's experience services

differently & to learn from their experience, challenging where resident influence is not in-built.

- Strategic - strategic decision-makers understanding the importance of resident influence and the impact it should have; strategic decision-makers challenging when broad spectrum of resident experience is not evident in recommendations for change, strategically involved residents seeking out wider resident experiences & do not simply contribute their own experiences & make decisions based on these examples.

### **Listening**

- Individual - having a chat with a resident and listening, communicating / giving feedback in plain English and in a range of languages (where necessary), listening to local or community level insight (e.g. resident groups, social media), receiving a complaint or compliment and hearing what is being said.
- Operational and procedural - commissioning, designing & analysing resident feedback & consultation exercises, Analysing transactional & qualitative insights & data (non-vocalised resident experience), Hearing the experiences of a constituted group, participating in estate inspections or other local-based activities, developing a neighbourhood agreement.
- Strategic - Listening to the recommendations made from the formal influencing vehicles e.g. Scrutiny Panel, ensure initiatives presented to Board show how the resident voice has been heard

### **Process**

- Individual - challenging ineffective processes, being inquisitive & curious about the impact of processes
- Operational and procedural - developing processes to ensure resident influence is a key part of service design and delivery, building sufficient activities & time into processes to enable resident experience of services (including non-vocalised) to genuinely influence service design and delivery
- Strategic - challenging examples of where insufficient attention has been given to resident influencing opportunities, leading by example when commissioning work to understand resident experiences by expecting compliance with process, building in to reporting process the expectation that resident influence is a key consideration

## 6. Aims and Objectives

- a. We will work with customers to develop a resident influence framework that will provide a wide range of accessible opportunities for residents to engage, feedback and influence.

We recognise the importance of offering a range of activities in which as many residents as possible can take part that can influence and, therefore, improve services. Those influencing activities are summarised in the graphic below.



The diminishing size of the segments in this graphic reflects that fewer residents will be involved in activities such as leading and collaborating, however all activities are valuable.

To ensure that the overall value gained from each activity is similar we will give appropriate regards to the greater volume of residents influencing through, for example “be aware” and “opt in”.

- Lead – provide strategic opportunities for tenants through the Council’s governance structure.
  - Collaborate – Influence through insight and scrutiny activities
  - Co- create – member of a formal involvement group or a regular contributor
  - Chip in – complete surveys, contribute to social media, register a complaint, attend local meetings.
  - Opt-in – add name to a database to be consulted and surveyed in the future
  - Be Aware – read newsletters, website and social media.
- b. We acknowledge that all form of feedback and insight have value. We will use all forms of customer insight and feedback to improve the services that matter most to customers.

- c. We will be clear when promoting influencing opportunities to customers, explaining what it is, what it will entail and how the outcomes will benefit them.
- d. We will use existing data analysis to identify and understand key themes. This will play a crucial role to help target listening activities and by doing so get a clear understanding of the customer experience.
- e. We will monitor and review the impact on residents and the organisation This may include cost and savings; the number of changes to strategic policies and process implemented and related benefits; improvements in service delivery; VFM and social value.
- f. We will adopt a closed loop feedback approach. This will ensure that residents are provided with a clear understanding of how we have used their feedback to make changes and the impact it has had. We will also ensure that the same information is routinely shared with employees to help embed resident influence in day to day activities.
- g. We will ensure that our tenants and leaseholders are supported to participate and engage in both regional and national opportunities to have their voice heard.

## **7. How will we deliver?**

An action plan will be developed which will set out the steps to be taken to implement this strategy.

A Resident Influence Panel will be established that will initially oversee the implementation of the action plan. Going forward the panel will act to ensure that residents' experiences are influencing service design and delivery.

To ensure that resident influence is heard at every level we will provide opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to be represented within the Council governance structure.

To ensure that as many residents as possible engage with us we will provide a wide range of accessible ways to feedback and influence both formally and informally. This will include the greater use of digital platforms to ensure that we hear a wide range of experiences.

We will ensure that appropriate and sufficient resources for resident influencing activities are made available and this will be reviewed on an annual basis.

We will put a focus on capacity building to remove any barriers and empower, encourage and enable more residents to participate.

We will engage with voluntary groups and organisations that operate across Gateshead to identify volunteer opportunities for tenants and leaseholders who may wish to engage with us.

We recognise that the successful implementation of this strategy will depend on embedding the role of resident influence in all employee roles and activities. We will achieve this through a range of actions including job profiles, recruitment, induction and training.

We will work with residents to develop a closed loop feedback approach.

Whilst our approach will aim to ensure that we meet the regulatory standards, we will look to go beyond by keeping track of emerging trends and best practice.

## **8. Measuring Impact**

We will develop a range of measures to evaluate the impact of our Resident Influence strategy. These will initially include:

- Tenant feedback on their experience. We will proactively seek this out via a range of channels.
- Performance indicators that measure customer satisfaction with key services that matter the most to tenants and leaseholders.
- An ongoing self-assessment against the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.
- We will aim to seek TPAS accreditation in 12 – 18 months from the date this strategy is agreed. This will provide an independent evidence-based assurance that we are meeting the requirements of the regulatory standard and our strategic objectives.

## **9. Review**

We will work with residents to review and update this strategy on an annual basis to ensure that it continues to deliver the stated aims and objectives and reflects emerging trends and best practice.