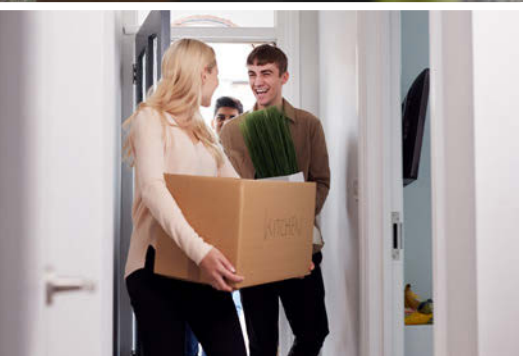


# DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES

## TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

### 2023-2026



**DARTFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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## **Foreword**

I am pleased to present our Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy 2023-2026.

The Council has worked hard to ensure that it sets clear guidance on how it will work with tenants and leaseholders to improve the delivery of housing services through these challenging times.

The Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy sets the standards for partnership working with tenants and leaseholders in monitoring our housing services and our continuing commitment to encourage tenants and leaseholders to be involved.

The Council recognises that tenants and leaseholders need to be involved at different levels and has developed a range of ways for them to participate meaningfully in its engagement initiatives.

I would like to thank the Dartford Tenants' & Leaseholders' Forum and other tenants and leaseholders who are engaged with our housing services, for their hard work and commitment to improving the services for everyone.

I look forward to continuing the good work that we do in partnership to improve our local communities.

Councillor Jeremy Kite MBE  
Leader of the Council



## OUR VISION

This three-year Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy has been developed to identify future requirements of the Council as a result of consultation, expectations from the Regulator of Social Housing and a commitment to put tenants and leaseholders at the heart of service delivery.

### Introduction

This Strategy sets out our path to ensuring our tenants and leaseholders are able to have their voices heard and taken on board in a meaningful way. It highlights our responsibilities and ensures engagement is tailored to suit the needs of our tenants and leaseholders.

### It also links to the Council's broader goals:

- To support its overall vision to make Dartford 'a place of quality, choice and safety. A place where great communities, concern for the environment and a successful economy support people who want to live, work and enjoy leisure time'.
- To support the strategic aim to quality of facilities, choice and diversity in the housing market, assist in meeting the housing need in Dartford and deliver high quality services to service users (Corporate Plan 2021-2023).
- In order to be inclusive with our engagement, we have due regard to the Council's Equality and Diversity Document Framework which sets out how we will meet the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.
- We have already started the process of improving our engagement initiatives and have used feedback from our recent resident engagement survey in developing this Strategy. The responses to the survey reflect the positive role that tenants and leaseholders play in shaping our services, which in turn reaffirms our commitment to involving tenants and leaseholders in the design and improvement of our services.

We believe that listening to tenants and leaseholders is vital in order for our housing service to meet their needs. This Strategy is our guide to future engagement with tenants and leaseholders who we hope will support us by working in partnership to shape our housing service.

The Council recognises the need for tailored and meaningful participation by tenants and leaseholders in its housing decisions.

This Strategy replaces our previous resident involvement agreement and has been developed in consultation with tenants and leaseholders and the Dartford Tenants' & Leaseholders' Forum.

The Strategy aims to ensure that the needs of Dartford tenants and leaseholders are placed at the centre of our housing services. The emphasis is upon tenants and leaseholders 'participating in monitoring, improving and have influence in decision making'.

We aim to offer tenants and leaseholders a range of options so that they may choose a level of engagement in shaping our policies and practices that suit them. Levels of engagement can range from being kept informed, through newsletters and focused communications such as notifications of activities taking place in their community or consultations.

Allowing tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to influence and improve the quality of life in properties and on estates is important to us.

All parties agree be open, honest and respectful so that all feel comfortable in sharing their experiences, views and opinions on housing issues freely.

## RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AT DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Dartford Borough Council provides over 4300 affordable homes with a mix of houses, flats and housing scheme properties. In recent years, the Council has developed over 120 new homes to increase the number of local people benefitting from affordable housing.

We are committed to providing a service shaped by our partnership working with tenants and leaseholders and delivering housing particularly for vulnerable people in the most need.

We want to create engagement that offers tenants and leaseholders a choice in the way that they are able to work with us in a way that suits them. A menu of engagement, both formal and informal, with differing time and commitment needs, includes consultations, surveys, local events and consultation with our main consultative group, the Dartford Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum.

Membership of the Dartford Tenants' and Leaseholders' Forum is comprised of tenants and leaseholders who share a common goal - 'To ensure that the services delivered by Dartford Borough Council are accessible to all'. They do this by monitoring services, influencing policies, and helping to ensure tenants and leaseholders' voices are heard by the Council at meetings with Council staff, contractors and Councillors.





## DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

This Strategy provides a guide in which tenants and leaseholders can be fully involved in challenging existing arrangements, comparing with other landlords and continually reviewing how consultation and participation can be most effectively delivered.

The Council will ensure that tenants and leaseholders are able to take a full and active part in designing, developing, monitoring and reviewing housing services at strategic and local level. To help tenants and leaseholders in this, the Council will:

- Work with tenants and leaseholders, including the Dartford Borough Tenants & Leaseholders Forum who are responsible for monitoring contracts for the delivery of the housing service
- Commission and undertake service specific and resident satisfaction surveys
- Share up-to date and timely information with all stakeholders through newsletters, leaflets, email and the Council website
- Ensure regular meetings between Councillors and tenants and leaseholders take place including the Housing Advisory Board. The Housing Advisory Board has been established to enable recommendations from tenants, leaseholders, Councillors and Officers to be taken forward on housing policies and other relevant housing matters. The Board is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and vice chaired by the Chair of the Dartford Tenants and Leaseholders Forum.
- Carryout consultation exercises as appropriate
- Provide training to tenants and leaseholders to enable them to fully participate in the design, development, delivery, monitoring and review of the Council's Housing Service
- Work to ensure that all tenants and leaseholders are represented with particular focus on those from underrepresented groups.



## Tenants and Leaseholders views on engagement and their priorities

In early 2021, tenants and leaseholders were invited to take part in a consultation exercise to help the Council develop this Strategy and action plan in order to improve tenant and leaseholder engagement. Tenants and leaseholders' feedback included:

### Tenants and leaseholders' Priorities

The top five topics of the housing service that are most important to tenants and leaseholders are:

- Value for money for their rent
- Safety and Security of their home
- Quality of their home
- Repairs and maintenance service
- Tackling anti-social behaviour

### Communication Preferences

The most preferred forms of communication from the housing service are paper copy newsletters/letter and electronic (email and text)

### Taking Part in Engagement Activities

31% of respondents had previously taken or were currently taking part in engagement activities, with 38% felt their views were listened to and taken into account in decisions made about the housing services they receive. 22% disagreed with this statement and the remainder held a neutral position.

### Barriers to Engagement

Tenants and leaseholders who have yet to engage in activities told us that they wanted more information about what opportunities were available for them, and this would make them more likely to participate in the future.

### Further suggestions from the survey:

- Improved communication – keep tenants and leaseholders informed, give more information, provide feedback and be open, be easy to contact, approachable and friendly
- Choice and flexibility - Have choice and flexibility in the way tenants and leaseholders can have their voices heard, both via digital and in person channels to suit different needs, and have varied times and days for engagement
- Voice of the resident - ask listen and act on views
- Complaints - listen to and act and learn from complaints
- Reach out - come to us, meet us where we live, discuss local issues affecting our estates
- Accessibility and inclusion - make it easier for older vulnerable or disabled tenants and leaseholders to take part improve digital

## Improving Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement

To improve tenants and leaseholders' engagement and meet the requirements outlined above, we have adopted six clear commitments towards effective engagement. These are:

1. To be clear on what our engagement offering is.
2. To publicise our engagement activities.
3. To offer a range of flexible engagement methods but prioritise tenant meetings, forums and community events.
4. Our involved tenants and leaseholders will have the skills to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.
5. To offer a range of engagement topics, but to place significant focus on value for money, safety and security, quality of homes, repairs and maintenance services, anti-social behaviour, complaints.
6. To be accountable to our tenants and leaseholders by providing feedback, continuing consultation and ensuring that topics are relevant and the frequency and methods.

A detailed account of each commitment can be found in Appendix 1 to this Strategy.

### How we are regulated as a social landlord

As a social housing provider, there are regulatory requirements that we must adhere to in relation to resident engagement, as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing. We must make sure we comply with certain standards, including the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017'.

The Standard sets out the following three required outcomes and as detailed in Appendix 2 to this Strategy:

- Customer Service, Choice and Complaints
- Involvement and Empowerment
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

### The Charter for Social Housing Residents 2020

The Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper) sets out what every tenant and leaseholder should expect from their social housing landlord. It requires every social housing landlord be transparent about their performance and decision-making, so that tenants, leaseholders and the Regulator can hold them to account, put things right when they go wrong and listen to tenants and leaseholders through effective engagement. To ensure that landlords meet the expectations the Charter sets out seven key themes for tenants, leaseholders and landlords these can be found in Appendix 3. The Charter also includes a commitment to introduce a set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures so that tenants and leaseholders can tell us how we are performing.



### TPAS Tenant Engagement Standards

TPAS, “the tenant engagement experts”, are a not for profit organisation who promote, support and champion tenant involvement and empowerment in social housing across England. Membership is comprised of local tenants and landlord organisations.

Along with our regulatory responsibilities and as part of our commitment to providing effective engagement we are working towards the TPAS Tenant Engagement Standards. TPAS.

#### This means that we are committed to:

##### Governance and Transparency

- Providing a clear, widely publicised route for tenants and leaseholders to hold the Council to account.
- Providing an environment of mutual respect between the Council and its tenants and leaseholders.
- Publicly sharing how the Council learn from tenant and leaseholder engagement.
- Providing regular assurance to tenants and leaseholders how the Council keeps them safe in their homes and meet regulatory requirements.
- Providing an annual report to tenants and leaseholders.
- Consults a minimum of every three years with tenants and leaseholders regarding the housing management service.
- Publishes information regarding the roles and responsibilities of senior members of staff.

##### Scrutiny

- Valuing scrutiny as a critical friend from an independent tenant and leaseholder led process.
- Embracing that scrutiny is designed to improve services and increase efficiency.
- Providing scrutiny with the financial and administrative support it needs to carry out its business.
- Providing scrutiny with all relevant performance information so that it can carry out its business.

##### Business and Strategy

- Tenants and leaseholders are meaningfully engaged in the co-creation, monitoring and review of the council’s engagement strategy.
- Tenants and leaseholders are meaningfully engaged in the development, monitoring and review of policy, services and strategic development.
- Tenants, leaseholders and Council staff are clear on the purpose and outcomes of all engagement activities with timescales provided.
- Providing a clear engagement plan for engaging with tenants and leaseholders regarding health and safety.
- Providing a clear and consistent method for tenants and leaseholders to feedback their views on any engagement activities.

### Complaints

- Providing a clear, accessible and publicised complaints policy.
- Providing information regarding the Housing Ombudsman.
- Using complaints as an opportunity to listen, learn and influence change and engaging with tenants and leaseholders as part of this continuous learning.
- Ensuring complaints are documented, communicated and publicised to stakeholders.
- Actively encouraging tenants and leaseholders to be part of the complaints review process.

### Information and Communication

- Ensuring all information is provided to tenants and leaseholders in a clear and understandable format.
- Ensuring the Council’s website content and design are clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it, while supporting those who do need to adapt things.
- Ensuring the Council’s website provides useful and up to date information.
- Providing an accessible route for tenants and leaseholders to request information regarding the services provided to them.
- Provide tenants and leaseholders with regular, up to date information.

### Resources for Engagement

- For the Council to provide sufficient resources for effective engagement.
- Having an appropriate system in place to for recognition and reimbursement for time given to engagement activities.
- Offering relevant training, advice and mentoring for involved tenants and leaseholders.
- Ensuring that all staff can describe the benefits that tenant and leaseholders’ engagement can bring to not only those involved, the council and the wider community.

### Community and Wider Engagement

- Providing an appropriate range of engagement activities.
- Providing opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to engage in emerging social housing policy.
- Keeping tenants and leaseholders informed about any planned regeneration or improvements.
- Providing a clear approach to promoting and supporting community action.

### Engagement for all

We are committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. In delivering this Strategy, we will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.

We want to ensure that we provide a housing service that is inclusive and representative for all. This Strategy will support us to deliver this commitment where we will provide the support to enable all tenants to be involved.

This Strategy aims to widen our engagement offer and will seek to use a variety of ways as set out in our action plan at Appendix 4), to reach a number of diverse groups within our community.

### Keeping accountable

It is important that tenants and leaseholders are able to hold us to account to ensure that we are delivering what we say we will and upholding our commitments. In order to do this we have set out an action plan at Appendix 4, to show what we are aiming to deliver over the next three [3] years.

Progress will be reported via the Dartford Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Forum, the Link newsletter, and digital platforms where appropriate and included in our Annual Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Report.



**To be clear on what our engagement offering is:**

- We want our tenants and leaseholders to contribute to how our services are delivered.
- We want to do this by offering a range of engagement activities both formal and informal. To achieve this we will:
- Consult with tenants and leaseholders to identify their priorities for engagement.
- Have a direct line of communication for tenant and leaseholder engagement
- Collectively develop the Resident Engagement Strategy with our tenants and leaseholders.

**To offer a range of engagement topics**

In addition to offering a range of activities, we want to ensure we focus on the key topics identified as part of the consultation, such as value for money, ASB, repairs and maintenance. To achieve this we will:

- Consult with tenants and leaseholders to identify their engagement priorities.
- Deliver a range of engagement topics based on priorities and regulatory requirements, such as but not limited to:
- Repairs
- Complaints
- Estate Management
- Leaseholders
- Digital Inclusion
- Social Isolation

**To publicise our engagement activities:**

We want to ensure that we provide a housing service that is inclusive and representative of all tenants and leaseholder. To achieve this, we will:

- Share the draft Resident Engagement Strategy with our tenants and leaseholders.
- Publicise our performance within our Annual Report.
- Increase our publicising of events and activities.

**To offer arrange of engagement methods.**

We want to ensure that we are delivering services that provides information and choices to meet the diverse needs of our tenants and leaseholders. To achieve this we will:

- Deliver a range of engagement methods, such as but not limited to:
- The Link – tenants’ and leaseholders’ newsletter
- Consultation.
- Satisfaction Surveys.
- Forums
- Focus Groups
- Community Events
- Digital platforms i.e. Council website

**To ensure engaged tenants and leaseholders have the skills to enable them to carry out their roles effectively:**

- Tenants and leaseholders will be offered training to understand the business and the sector
- A range of training opportunities will be offered to all tenants and leaseholders that are on panels, ad hoc training will be offered more widely
- We will explore mentoring opportunities for our tenants and leaseholders.

**To be accountable to our tenants and leaseholders:**

- We strive for continuous improvement and to put our tenants and leaseholders at the heart of everything we do.
- We recognise that our tenants and leaseholders have a right to know how we are performing in order to be able to hold us to account, To achieve this we will:
- Publish an annual housing services report focused on performance throughout the year.
- Publicise our Housing Complaints Policy and report on outcomes.
- Utilise satisfaction surveys.
- Increase the number of engaged tenants and leaseholders.
- Continue our work with the Dartford Tenants’ and Leaseholders’ Forum.





## Appendix 2 – Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard 2017

We must meet the requirements of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard that states that:

### Customer service, choice and complaints

Registered providers shall:

- Provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards.
- Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

### Involvement and Empowerment

Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- The scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
- The management of their homes, where applicable
- The management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and agreeing local offers for service delivery

### Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

Registered providers shall:

- Treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- Demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.



## Appendix 3 - Charter for Social Housing Residents 2020

The Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper) sets out what every tenant and leaseholder should expect from their social housing landlord. It requires every social housing landlord to be transparent about their performance and decision-making, so that tenants, leaseholders and the Regulator can hold them to account; put things right when they go wrong and listen to tenants and leaseholders through effective engagement.

The Charter was published in November 2020 and its recommendations provide the foundations for this Strategy. We are expecting a greater focus from the Regulator since the introduction of the Charter and will need to evidence that we are not only undertaking resident led engagement activities but to also show where we are co-creating services. The Charter set out seven key expectations for tenants, leaseholders and landlords, these are:

- To be safe in your home – the regulator will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
- To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so that tenants and leaseholders can hold it to account.
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give tenants and leaseholders swift and fair redress when needed.
- To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
- To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
- To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

## Appendix 4 - Resident Engagement Strategy Action Plan

Action	Timescale
Consult with tenants and leaseholders to identify what their priorities are for engagement.	Year 1
Ensure that when investigating complaints lessons learnt are recorded as part of the complaints process and reported regularly to tenants and leaseholders.	Year 1
Satisfaction of the complaints process will be recorded and regularly reported to the DT&LF and within our Annual Report to highlight customer satisfaction of our complaints process, and identify if improvements can be made.	Year 1, 2, 3
Share the tenant and leaseholder engagement strategy with tenants and leaseholders to provide an opportunity to inform and review the strategy.	Year 1
Regular reporting of complaints at Housing Advisory Board and DT&LF to provide an opportunity for scrutiny at a number of levels.	Year 1
Make improvements to the resident engagement area of the Council website in order to enable easy access to information about engagement activities in each area.	Year 1
Create Community Champions on our estates to provide a voice for each area, and offer an opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to regularly feedback on services, helping us work together to improve our estates.	Year 1
Establish Estate Surgeries on our estates to allow engagement with tenants and leaseholders in locations that are easily accessible and close to them	Year 1
Implementation of repair satisfaction surveys, providing tenants and leaseholders with the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions regarding any repairs carried out in their homes and estates.	Year 1
To publicise a diary of events linked to national agenda weeks that are relevant to housing, utilising the tenant engagement area of the website to share this information and keep it up to date.	Year 2, 3
Review policies and procedures with tenants and leaseholders as appropriate, to ensure that there are up to date, relevant and easily accessible for tenants and leaseholders on our website.	Year 1, 2, 3
To increase digital inclusion by working with local services to provide support to tenants and leaseholders that may be struggling with accessing a digital environment.	Year 2
Reducing social isolation by working with local services to provide support to tenants and leaseholders that are isolated and in need of support.	Year 2
Ensure that the Tenant and Leaseholder Handbook is up to date, relevant and easily accessible for all tenants and leaseholders.	Year 1
Provide a variety of community events for tenants and leaseholders across the borough, ensuring that events are meaningful and targeted to address local community issues.	Year 1, 2, 3
Introduce the use of satisfaction surveys following the closure of cases such as ASB and the completion of major works to the council's buildings and estates	Year 2, 3

For further information on Resident Engagement and how to get involved please contact the resident involvement officer at [rio@dartford.gov.uk](mailto:rio@dartford.gov.uk) or call 01322 343682

