

Tenant Voice Strategy

2020 - 2025

ForHousing 

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ForHousing is part of the ForViva Group and currently manages and owns 23,518 homes across the North West of England; primarily within Salford, Oldham, Knowsley, Fylde and Cheshire West and Chester, as well as other external commercial stock management arrangements.

Our vision is Improved Lives and our mission is to provide quality homes and places that make more things possible for more people. The Corporate Plan 2020-25 sets priorities for two key themes: 'Homes' and 'Communities' as we know these are vital to individual wellbeing, dignity, self-worth and life chances.

These priorities are underpinned by a commitment to do the right things, in the right way, to the right standard and at the right cost. We refer to these as the 4Cs: Customer, Culture, Compliance and Cost and this strategy has particular relevance to the Customer principle - to provide a positive customer experience. This includes developing and delivering services which are inclusive, wanted, easy to use and convenient to access.

In August 2018, the Government published its Green Paper, A new deal for social housing. The paper recognised that social housing reform is needed to make the housing market work for all parts of society, ensuring everyone has a decent, affordable and secure place to live. Five principles were highlighted as central to the reform.

This five year strategy, developed in collaboration with tenants, responds to the third principle "empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account", commonly referred to as Tenant Voice. It provides direction to strengthen our relationship with tenants, including how we listen to and learn from tenants, act on their feedback and ensure genuine oversight arrangements.

The individual and collective voice of tenants will also be relevant to the other principles of the Green Paper, which include having a safe and decent home, improving complaints handling, tackling the stigma of social housing and building social homes.

Our approach also responds to the key priorities identified in the Together With Tenants Plan developed by the National Housing Federation, which like the Green Paper, was influenced by extensive consultation with tenants and social housing sector partners. We have considered these resources alongside our own tenant consultation as a strong and representative steer on how tenants would like to be meaningfully involved in matters that affect them.

Summary

This five year strategy, 2020-25, sets out ForHousing's aspirations to work together with tenants to change homes and communities for the better.

The approach focuses on strengthening three specific areas: our relationship with tenants; tenant influence in decisions that affect them; and oversight arrangements that hold us to account.

Priorities and outcomes

Tenant Voice refers to individual and collective voices being heard to hold landlords to account. Underpinned by accountability and transparency, this requires effective engagement to ensure tenants know what to expect from their landlord. This housing experience should be largely consistent when compared to other landlords, regardless of where tenants live and the type of home they live in. Effective and genuine tenant oversight arrangements are also needed to support good governance.

ForHousing will achieve this Tenant Voice through the following key aim:

“We will work together with tenants to change homes and communities for the better”

ForHousing’s approach to Tenant Voice involves strengthening the following areas:

1. Relationships with tenants
2. Influence by tenants
3. Accountability to tenants

Tenant Voice Objectives

1. We will strengthen relationships with tenants as individuals and as groups by:

Building trust, as the foundation on which all relationships are based

We want tenants to tell us our relationship is honest and transparent, and that we treat them fairly and with respect, as we know trust is needed to work effectively together. This is why we will tell tenants how we are run and the standard of service they have a right to expect. Particular attention will be given to building safety information including responsibilities.

Putting things right when they go wrong (redress)

We want tenants to tell us when things go wrong so we can effectively put it right first time through timely advice and action. We also want tenants to know we are open to all feedback as we consider this to be a key driver of service improvement. This is why we will have simple, accessible and well publicised routes to raise issues and make complaints. Timescales for giving a high quality response and ensuring swift and effective redress will also be widely communicated.

Celebrating the positive difference made by tenants

We want everyone to recognise the thriving communities and community spirit in the neighbourhoods where we have homes, and the role tenants have had in making this happen. This is why we will celebrate the individual and collective contribution people have made to improve their community, including inspiring others to also become active citizens.

2. We will strengthen the influence tenants have as individuals and as groups by:

Seeking the tenant voice

We want tenants to tell us they feel genuinely engaged in decisions that affect their lives. This is why we will provide the right range of accessible and convenient channels for tenants to have a say and be heard. To make sure the tenant voice is representative we will seek the views from a wide and diverse range of tenants, providing support, where it is needed, for tenants to be more involved. Channels will be agreed with tenants and

reviewed at least every three years to make sure they remain effective.

Valuing the views and experiences of tenants

We want tenants to tell us they find being involved rewarding and worthwhile. This is why we will work collaboratively with tenants to listen to and extract the tenant voice, making sure their views and experiences influence their homes and communities. We will publicise the difference made by the tenant voice to recognise its value and to evidence tenant engagement is meaningful. This will support sustained engagement with tenants already involved and may motivate others to become involved, expanding the tenant voice even further.

Supporting the regional and national tenant voice

We know that involved tenants are seeking to establish a national body to advocate for social housing tenants and it is recognised by Government that tenants should influence political processes that affect them. This is why we will support tenants who want to have a say outside of their neighbourhood including in government policy and as part of strategic networks. This includes sharing available opportunities and assistance to take part.

3. We will strengthen our accountability to tenants as individuals and as groups by:

Developing tenant oversight arrangements

We know that tenants make us more accountable when they are well informed. This is why we will mutually agree areas of monitoring and reporting with tenants. Genuine tenant scrutiny and oversight arrangements will involve two way conversations at all levels within ForHousing, including with the Board, with action taken in response to feedback. We will also highlight areas where targets have not been met, giving the reasons why and sharing planned actions to drive improvements. Above all we will ensure our approach is accessible, clear and consistent, whilst also enabling comparisons to other housing providers.

Delivery: Customer, Culture, Compliance and Cost

Customer - Do the right things

In the first year of this strategy we commit to investing in community conversations in neighbourhoods where we have homes. Delivered with an independent third party, this will involve working side by side, as equals, with tenants, local communities and stakeholders to determine how we will deliver our Corporate Plan. This two way conversation is the cornerstone of our approach as it will ensure the Tenant Voice is at the heart of everything we do, with every tenant listened to on the issues that matter to them. The conversations will complement tenant panels and groups already in place to oversee and support the delivery of services in local areas.

Our investments aim to address an identified problem or meet a particular need and the Tenant Voice will help us identify where these can be made to achieve the biggest impact. We will also take into account the potential positive and/or negative impact of investment decisions on tenants when considering options.

We will continue to work closely with community leaders and tenant groups, supporting capacity building where it is needed to develop these and other community assets. This will capitalise on the strengths of local people and increase capacity to deliver community led activities. We particularly value the skills, local knowledge and dedication of these active citizens and are committed to providing assistance needed to continue this important work. This includes providing advice, training, and financial assistance. We

believe that services for tenants and communities should be co-created to ensure they meet need and add value. This is achieved by working together to define problems and design solutions.

Tenant insight will come from multiple sources including community conversations, tenant panels and groups, tenant scrutiny, tenant satisfaction surveys and complaints, as some of the key channels we use to seek tenant views. This will be reviewed alongside other sources of insight, including contact management information, performance data, contract monitoring, value for money assessments, outcome reports and financial information to give a full picture of our activities and how these are viewed by tenants.

We will acknowledge the work of National Tenant Organisations as representatives of the wider tenant base. We consider these organisations offer additional opportunities for tenants to get involved and be empowered, including independent and impartial advice and specialist training and support. These organisations have a valuable role in championing the Tenant Voice and their member consultations give helpful tenant insight on matters of political or social importance happening in the social housing sector.

Culture - In the right way

Staff and contractors will be supported to build competencies needed to effectively facilitate and support the Tenant Voice. Their role will be vital in building trust with tenants on behalf of ForHousing to strengthen the relationship between tenant and landlord. This will include training on ForHousing's values of Passion, Openness, Respect and Trust, which define the things that are important to ForHousing and direct the way we work.

Similarly, our customer care principles of HEART give a clear steer on what staff should keep in mind when delivering internal and external services. This represents: Have the right attitude; Ensure you do all you can – own it; Always deliver on promises; Recognise people are individuals; and Treat them with respect.

Staff will be trained on complaints handling to ensure they recognise expressions of dissatisfaction and always take them seriously. They will be responsible for initiating a rapid, appropriate and acceptable operational response to the issue, including negotiating the remedy and timescale for delivery. It is expected that staff will deliver these promises, understanding and managing the implications of failing to do so, should this occur. A learning from complaints culture will put in place actions to make sure we do not repeat service failures.

As part of our performance management framework, services will be accountable for evidencing they have listened to and acted on the Tenant Voice, particularly for decisions which affect tenants. This includes the rationale for variances between different parts of the business such as geographic areas of operation.

Our document control framework oversees the development, approval and review of strategies, policies and procedures, to ensure we are only using the current and correct version of these documents. These outline corporate priorities for everyone to collectively work towards, set consistent arrangements and standards for service delivery and ensure there is a full understanding and adherence to legal, regulatory or statutory requirements.

We will establish regular, consistent and timely communication methods that achieve a balance in the amount, frequency and type of information. This will be appropriate to the audience, the message and what tenants really want to know. Information will also be in

accessible formats and languages.

Compliance - To the right standard

This strategy provides a framework for embedding the principles set out in the Green Paper as the first steps to social housing reform. It will also ensure we meet the standards set by the housing regulator, particularly in the area of tenant involvement and empowerment. By focusing on these requirements we will capture and act on what matters most to tenants.

We will make sure our engagement and involvement channels capture a wide and diverse range of voices, including the 'harder to reach' and those we do not usually hear from. We will also make sure the voices of children and young people are represented. This will use tenant and community profiles to effectively direct efforts and use innovative ways to engage including digitally.

We will work collaboratively with tenants to agree how we will act on insight in ways which will have a lasting impact. By co-creating a series of place-based 'local offers' we will agree how we and others will work together to target our activities in the neighbourhoods where they are needed most.

Our redress policy outlines how we will put things right should a tenant or customer complain to us. This comprises of offering and delivering a suitable remedy, recognising the impact made by the issue, providing reassurance that the issue will not happen again and, where appropriate, offering recompense to the complainant for any harm, cost or inconvenience. All complaints will be recorded by service area, aspect, emotion and key demographics so we can learn from this feedback to improve.

Cost - At the right cost

Arrangements are in place for services to assess and report their performance annually, based around our value for money framework. This includes reporting outcomes achieved which deliver against the corporate objectives of Homes and Communities. This will provide opportunity to highlight how tenants have been involved in identifying priorities for investment, to invest in the right things, but also examples of co-creation and joint procurement decisions. Services can also evidence how they have used tenant feedback and the degree to which this has made a difference.

ForHousing will work collaboratively with tenants to plan and deliver against the priorities within this strategy and monitor progress. This includes reviewing and signing off outcomes reported and assessing value for money by taking resources used into account. This will be compared to peers as a benchmark for measuring performance.

Measuring success

The success of this strategy will be measured primarily through tenant feedback on their experience and clear audit trails evidencing tenant insight has informed service delivery and other decisions about homes and communities. This will include regular conversations with involved tenants to gauge their view on how well this strategy is being delivered.

Tenant engagement is only effective if it takes views seriously and into account to shape services. We will therefore also ask the wider tenant base, using appropriate channels,

whether they feel they have a voice and that this is valued, listened to and makes a difference.

We will measure the impact of redress rearrangements through tenant satisfaction of complaints handling. We will publish information about complaints, including the number, nature and outcome and how we applied learning from complaints to improve services.

We will complete self-assessments against the regulatory standards and commission third parties to carry out assessments of how well we deliver customer care and ensure equality, diversity and inclusion. This will provide challenge and checks that we have delivered against commitments and nationally recognised standards.

Performance indicators will focus on key areas of importance. This will capture activities across the regulatory standards including keeping properties in good repair; maintaining the safety of buildings; effective handling of complaints; respectful and helpful engagement with tenants; and responsible neighbourhood management, including tackling anti-social behaviour. Other indicators will be agreed through engagement with tenants.

The annual evaluation of outcomes will be presented to involved tenants for approval as a clear and accurate picture of Tenant Voice activities and the difference this has made.

Governance

The ForHousing Board is responsible for ensuring ForHousing meets the housing regulator's prescribed outcomes and specific expectations of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. ForHousing has autonomy to choose how these are achieved, although this must include supporting tenants to shape and scrutinise service delivery and to hold the Board to account. The Board will also continue to get updates on social housing reform, including Tenant Voice, along with ForHousing's response. This strategy will be reviewed and updated in response to these developments.

Document summary

This strategy provides direction to strengthen our relationship with tenants, including how we listen to and learn from tenants, act on their feedback and ensure genuine oversight arrangements.

Research

A Voice for Tenants (AV4T). This group was set up in 2017 in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy to seek the establishment of a national body in England to advocate for social housing tenants. We particularly considered this group's response to the Social Housing Green Paper as it represents all the existing National Tenant Organisations and took into account survey responses from 627 social housing tenants. This specifically champions a local, regional and national voice for tenants.

National Housing Federation, Together with Tenants Plan and Charter. This work was referenced as planned in the Green Paper and refers to an accountability and transparency offer setting out what tenants can expect from their landlord. Completed in July 2019, 2,500 consultation responses from tenants, residents, housing associations and

other stakeholders informed the plan and charter. This specifically advocates for better relationships between tenants and landlords and boards being accountable to tenants.

ForHousing's tenant survey. In July 2019, a survey was carried out with tenants by email, through social media and over the phone or face to face when tenants made enquiries. The 1,615 responses gave insight on what tenants thought ForHousing could do to work with tenants, so they "truly have a voice in your community". The findings, along with similar key messages from our Tenant Voice forum, have been taken into account within this strategy. This is specifically listening to and talking to tenants, engaging locally, collecting feedback and providing regular information.

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