

# Have your say in housing services



**Housing Services  
Resident Involvement Strategy**  
2015-2018

**Stevenage**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Contents

Message from the Executive Member for Housing .....	3
Message from the Chair of Housing Management Board .....	4
Introduction .....	5
What do we mean by Resident Involvement?.....	6
Our outcomes and priorities for 2015 - 2018.....	7
Outcomes and priorities table .....	7
Priority 1 - Enable residents to get involved in decision making .....	8
Priority 2 - Offer a range of options to get involved .....	9
Priority 3 – Meet regulatory requirements and deliver best practice .....	10
Priority 4 – Impact of involvement is measured and communicated .....	11
How we will measure success strategy action plan .....	12
Co-operative principles and equality and diversity .....	14
Our vision, our mission and our values .....	15

## Councillor's commitment to this strategy

### Stevenage Borough Council Councillors can and regularly do act as community advocates representing customers as groups or as individuals.

They can help customers to resolve their housing related matters across a broad range of areas including problems with the home they live in, issues within their neighbourhoods and queries concerning the allocation scheme.

Your local Councillor can contact the Council on your behalf and will be able to give you guidance on how a particular issue can be resolved.

Collectively we believe this strategy shows a clear commitment to working in partnership with council tenants and leaseholders to shape, strengthen and improve council housing services. By making sure residents are at the heart of decision-making we will ensure housing services are customer focussed and working towards continuous improvement.

The Council will regularly review resident involvement to make sure we are:

- Placing residents at the heart of what the housing services does
- Being clear about how and in what residents can get involved
- Providing a wide variety of ways for people to get involved
- Making sure residents understand the outcomes and impact of their involvement
- Regularly reviewing our approach to resident involvement
- Aiming to increase tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with housing services
- Providing information on the outcomes of their involvement.

The outcomes of our reviews will be on the Council's website and provided in the annual review of housing services.

# Message from the Executive Member for Housing

## I am pleased to introduce Stevenage Borough Council's Resident Involvement Strategy 2015-18.

This strategy sets out our commitment to encourage and support the involvement of residents in improving council housing services. It focuses on how we involve council tenants, leaseholders and people on the housing register in how housing services are organised and delivered. In this document we refer to these groups of people collectively as 'residents'.

We know involving residents is essential to the success of the housing service. This strategy will explain how residents can get involved in decision making, how we will expand the range of ways they can do so and how we intend to monitor the outcomes of involvement activities.

To ensure a joined up approach, we have made sure the strategy relates directly to the council's corporate objective – 'put residents first' and the housing service objective – 'to involve residents in shaping services and in the decision making process'.

We have also linked this strategy to the council's corporate values, priorities, policies and strategies and to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 year Business Plan and how we deliver this.

Our objective for this strategy is to make sure residents know how they can get involved, when they can get involved and the difference that their involvement can make to the housing services they receive. We have set out how we will feed back and measure the results of resident involvement both now and in the future.

I feel sure this strategy will help us take resident involvement to the next level developing upon the good practice we are known for.

### **Councillor Ann Webb** Executive Member for Housing



## Message from Housing Management Board Chair

### In November 2013, the Housing Management Board (HMB) was set up.

Our joint resident, councillor and key staff panel started their work by making recommendations to the Council's Executive on long-term plans for housing services. This has resulted in a new stage of joint working between the Council and its residents.

The Housing Management Board will be involved in monitoring progress and performance against the targets set in this strategy. They will use the performance information gathered to refresh this strategy and action plan and to make further recommendations to the Council as it strives for excellence in its housing services.

The HMB members are all looking forward to progressing this work through our schedule and trust that this strategy will secure more involvement of residents and improved housing services.

**Len Saunders**  
Chair of the HMB



## Did you know that....

**The Housing Management Board (HMB) makes recommendations to the Council about housing service plans, policies and budgets.**

The Board is made up of 4 customers (3 tenants and 1 leaseholder), 5 councillors, and 3 members of staff with overall responsibility for housing services.

The Board work together to put Stevenage's housing customers at the heart of the service and make sure that they are involved in improving housing services.

The Board members are; Len Saunders, Jon Thurlow, Gervase Muller, Cathy Govey, Councillors John Lloyd, Phil Bibby, Liz Harrington, Carol Latif, David Kissane and staff members Matt Partridge, Jaine Cresser and Tony Campbell (as of 1 April 2015).

**The Customer Scrutiny Panel's role is to inspect the quality and performance of housing services.**

This year the Panel reviewed satisfaction with major works to homes and caretaking services. Improvement plans are in place and these are being monitored by the Housing Management Board.

The tenant and leaseholder group members are; Lesley Storey, Ted Jones, Les Isaacs, Fiona Plumridge, Jean Sebastian, Doreen Howell, Patrick Sichali, Sid Walker and Chris Danpure (as of 1 April 2015).

To find out more about the Housing Management Board or Customer Scrutiny Panel please contact the resident involvement team on 01438 242183 or email [resident.involvement@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:resident.involvement@stevenage.gov.uk). Direct enquiries can be sent to their specific email addresses [HousingManagementBoard@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:HousingManagementBoard@stevenage.gov.uk) or [CustomerScrutinyPanel@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:CustomerScrutinyPanel@stevenage.gov.uk)

# Introduction

## We have a long history of involving residents in how housing services are delivered.

This commitment was reinforced with the introduction of the first written pledge to involve residents with the 'Tenant Compact', which was published in 1999. The objectives for involvement activities and the work plan were agreed and monitored by residents. The Compact remained in place until 2008 when the first 'resident involvement strategy' was agreed. We reviewed this strategy as part of the work to produce this document and worked with residents to assess the ways we could further involve existing and future residents.

### To develop the strategy we consulted with the following groups of residents:<sup>1</sup>

- Housing Management Board
- Customer Scrutiny Panel
- Resident Inspectors
- Housing Forum
- Customer Pool
- Involved internal groups
- Resident groups

Responses from this consultation were used to help develop this strategy.

This document sets out what we are seeking to achieve for the housing service by 2018. The aim is to build on the previous strategy and its previous successes and set new, more challenging, expectations to ensure we remain at the forefront of resident involvement development.

<sup>2</sup>The Localism Act 2011 reinforced the point that social landlords (local authorities with housing stock and registered housing providers such as housing associations)

must make sure that residents are given the opportunity to work with their landlord to improve housing services. This includes jointly managing performance and working together on resident priorities. This helps make sure residents' views influence how services are planned and delivered.

The housing regulator<sup>3</sup> is the 'Homes and Communities Agency' (HCA). It regulates social housing through the 'Regulatory Standards for Social Housing 2012'. This comprises six national standards that social housing providers must meet, including the standard for 'tenant involvement and empowerment'. This standard focusses on making sure residents' voices are heard and taken into account when decisions are made about housing services.

To help make sure resident involvement is 'fit for purpose', we reviewed the service in Stevenage in 2013/14. This led us to focus on how we work together with residents in 'a co-regulatory approach', and our promise to put residents at the heart of what we provide. This helped us ensure effective accountability to residents.

We have been implementing some of the key recommendations from the review to develop how we work. In 2012 we reinforced the role of tenant scrutiny by introducing the Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP), who meet monthly. Once a year the panel members discuss and agree their focus and the housing service areas they wish to review. This panel scrutinises the housing service and reports its findings to the new Housing Management Board (HMB).

The results of the Customer Scrutiny Panel's work are published so that all residents can see the difference the reviews make to services.

Our aim for the future is to involve housing customers in shaping housing services further ensuring that the range of ways that customers can get involved is broad enough for everyone to have their say if they wish to. We will also be setting out how we will measure the success of this strategy.

The Housing Management Board will lead on this work at a strategic level. They made a good start on their work in their first six months of operation as they discussed, debated and commented upon:

- Our new housing development programme
- The financial inclusion strategy
- Damp and mould policy
- 30 year HRA Business Plan priorities
- HRA Delivery Plan (action plan for improving housing services)
- Housing Revenue Account budgets and priorities
- STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) customer satisfaction survey results and action plan
- Potential rent increases, their impact and explanation.

The Housing Management Board<sup>1</sup> holds an annual away day to plan its work schedule and projects. Members meet monthly. For more information email

[HousingManagementBoard@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:HousingManagementBoard@stevenage.gov.uk)

The Customer Scrutiny Panel<sup>1</sup> meets every six weeks. For more information email [CustomerScrutinyPanel@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:CustomerScrutinyPanel@stevenage.gov.uk)

<sup>1</sup> [www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/110971/](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/110971/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/...data/.../1896534.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/...data/.../1896534.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/.../homes-and-communities-agency](http://www.gov.uk/government/.../homes-and-communities-agency)

## What do we mean by 'Resident Involvement'?

Resident involvement is giving residents who use council housing services the opportunity to influence, challenge and scrutinise the services they receive.

Resident involvement is a two way process, involving sharing of information and ideas and effective feedback. This allows residents the opportunity to influence decisions made about the housing services they receive and we report their achievements and work in the tenant annual report *Housing Matters* every year.



Housing Forum members Jean Day, John Robinson and Eric Borley.

# Our outcomes and priorities for 2015-18

## In 2013/14 the Council carried out a full review of resident involvement structures to:

- Identify good practice
- Identify options to strengthen the Council's housing involvement, empowerment and governance framework.

The review was led by a working group of tenants, leaseholders, staff and included an external critical friend to support residents. The working group included the Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Ann Webb. During the review we asked for the opinions of involved and non-involved residents and looked at best practice in other housing organisations in relation to co-regulation, scrutiny and the involvement of a wider

audience of tenants and leaseholders. Both quantitative and qualitative research was carried out to try and get a better understanding of what was important to residents and how and why they want to get involved.

We used the outcomes from this review, including ideas generated at workshops held in late 2014/early 2015, to help identify what is currently important to residents. We also used the results of our last tenant satisfaction survey (STAR, 2014) to give us a fuller understanding of key resident issues. This work has helped us formulate the objectives and priorities in this strategy and led to the development of an action plan to support delivery of this strategy.

## We will know we have met our priorities when these outcomes are met

Outcomes	Priorities
No challenges received against the regulatory framework.	We meet regulatory requirements and deliver best practice in resident involvement.
We achieve national recognition for good practice in involvement.	
We work closely with residents to develop service action plans that can be related back to customer feedback.	We enable residents to get involved in decision making.
We listen to what's important to residents and act on this information.	
We offer various ways for residents to get involved and influence housing services delivery.	We give residents a range of options to get involved at a level that suits them.
We support residents in their involvement by providing necessary information, training and resources.	
We regularly advertise involvement opportunities and recruit residents to them.	
We work together with residents to increase involvement generally and improve participation of under represented groups.	We measure the impact of resident involvement activities and communicate this.
We communicate clearly to residents how their involvement has helped improve services.	
Our customer scrutiny and co-regulatory arrangements are clear and show measureable improvements to housing services.	

## Priority one:

# We enable residents to get involved in decision making

### Consultation may depend on tenure and legislation gives residents the following rights:

- The right to be consulted and to have a say in how their homes are managed, maintained and about any changes that may affect them as customers.
- The right to have information about the terms of their tenancy, arrangements for housing services, and any other non-confidential information necessary to make decisions and give views.
- The right for tenants to manage their homes provided they meet certain conditions (please see [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)).
- Section 20 consultation for leaseholders.

To help residents to get involved we provide support. This includes funding for training, resident expenses and venue hire.

### This priority will be achieved by:

- Making sure residents feel valued and listened to.
- Making sure publicity materials are available in a range of formats.
- Ensuring residents have their say before key decisions are made on housing services.
- Making the impact residents can have on decision making clear and transparent.
- Offering the training and support residents need to help them in decision making.
- Offering training and support that meets residents' needs. This could be through internal training courses, shadowing, workshops and external training courses.
- Making sure out-of-pocket expenses are covered for involved residents.
- Giving feedback on how resident involvement has affected the Council's decision making processes.
- Encouraging and supporting the Customer Scrutiny Panel in their reviews and where possible acting upon their recommendations.



### Best practice

In November 2013, we set up the Housing Management Board. The 12 Board members include tenants, leaseholders, councillors and key staff. The Board are involved in strategic decision making for housing services. In 2014 the Board worked closely with us to set our 30 year Business Plan and they will be monitoring the delivery against this plan every six months. The Board makes recommendations to the Council's Executive.



Housing Management Board members Jon Thurlow, Gervase Muller and Cathy Govey

## Priority two:

# We provide residents with a range of options to get involved at a level that suits them

Last year we worked with residents to develop and publish a new menu of involvement. This menu includes a wide variety of ways to get involved, from completing a questionnaire to carrying out flat block inspections, or attending a group's regular meetings. The menu was designed so residents can get involved in a way that suits them regardless of their personal situation.

The menu is available on our website<sup>1</sup> and is sent out to all residents who express an interest in getting involved. To help make sure we continue to meet our commitment to work with customers to improve and enhance housing services, we will continue to develop the range of ways we offer for residents to get involved.

### This priority will be achieved by:

- An annual assessment of the range of ways residents can get involved.
- Developing and promoting the information we provide on how to get involved, what you can expect from us and what we expect from involved customers.
- Looking at and where appropriate implementing new ideas for involvement including text surveys and use of social media.
- Reviewing our customer pool database of interested residents to ensure they continue to be committed to being involved, are aware of the opportunities on offer to them and satisfied with what they can do and the impact they have on housing services.
- Providing regular newsletters to the pool on current involvement opportunities.
- Exploring how to involve younger residents.

<sup>1</sup> [www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/110971/](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/110971/)

## Best practice

The customer pool database is a pool of housing customers who are willing to get involved. We record how they like to get involved and the service areas they are interested in. This enables us to accurately target when we contact pool members with involvement opportunities. This includes groups that meet to discuss service areas such as the Leaseholder Meeting, Disability Advisory Panel, the Sheltered and Flexicare Housing Focus Group.

Our resident inspectors work closely with us to assess how well we perform against our standards. They regularly assess flat block caretaking, grounds maintenance and the condition of empty homes before they are let to new tenants.



Housing Forum members June Pease, Ken Nash and Dianne Green.

## Priority three:

# We meet regulatory requirements and deliver best practice in involvement

We must meet the requirements under the regulatory framework and the Localism Act 2011. Alongside this we need to consider and discuss with tenants, specifically, new ways they can get involved as set out in 'Tenants Leading Change'.<sup>1</sup> This sets out how tenants can make sure their landlord provides the services they want and the support and advice tenants can access if they are interested in empowerment and the participation opportunities available to them.

### This includes information on enabling tenants to:

- Set up tenant panels
- Take up training and support opportunities
- Exercise their 'Right to Manage'
- Take up opportunities to manage local housing services, such as repairs and estate management, through Tenant Cashback and Community Cashback
- Exercise their 'Right to Transfer' (change your landlord).

### This priority will be achieved by:

- Listening to and developing a better understanding of what's important to tenants and leaseholders.
- The development of co-regulation at a strategic level, by strengthening the role of the HMB.
- Discussing the ideas in 'tenants leading change' with tenants and agreeing the way forward on these ideas.
- Making sure residents are involved in any new involvement opportunities put forward by the regulator.
- Ensuring best practice in involvement is circulated and discussed with residents and that they agree on our approach to involvement.
- Working towards external accreditation of the resident involvement service.
- Building on our best practice in customer scrutiny as showcased to the London Scrutiny Network.

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenants-leading-change](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenants-leading-change)

<sup>2</sup> [www.tpas.org.uk](http://www.tpas.org.uk)

## Best practice

Last year tenant Len Saunders was shortlisted as one of the final three tenants in England for Tenant of the Year by the Tenant Empowerment Organisation – TPAS<sup>2</sup>.

TPAS is recognised as a champion of resident involvement, alongside the Chartered Institute of Housing, Housemark, Tenant and Residents Organisations of England, and Trafford Hall (a community training and development organisation). They are all involved in the tenant empowerment programme, which is currently funded until 2015.



Central Region's tenant of the year Len Saunders at the TPAS awards final in 2014.

## Priority four:

# We measure the impact of resident involvement activities and communicate this

We fully recognise that people want to know how their involvement made a difference and we greatly appreciate the time people give when helping us improve housing services. To recognise this, we will give updates on how we are using the information and the feedback that residents give us.

All resident involvement activity will have clear aims, roles, costs, time scales and expected outcomes. We will set these before we start a project and carry out a review at the end of each activity.

### This priority will be achieved by:

- Regular reports to HMB and CSP on involvement activities.
- Our commitment to inform residents how we have used their views and feedback.
- Our commitment to inform residents how we take views and recommendations forward.
- Measuring customer satisfaction and performance to look at efficiency and effectiveness. We will review satisfaction and performance six months after a housing service changes how it does things because of a resident involvement activity.
- An annual update on 'so I got involved – what happened next?' in our annual report to tenants.
- Regular information and updates on the impact of involvement at events, on paper, on the website and on social media.

## Best practice

143 residents (between April and December 2014) received training that can help in their involvement and in the workplace.

We successfully bid for £49,000 Job Centre Plus Flexible Support Grant and used this funding to train 22 local people in construction skills. Three people are now in work or further training.



Trainees receive their BTEC Construction Skills awards from the Mayor, Sherma Batson in December 2014

## How we will measure success

It's important that we measure our performance to make sure that we achieve the outcomes we have set out in this plan. We will develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable/Attainable, Realistic, Time bound) measures and targets. Our performance will be monitored by the Housing Management Board. This strategy will be reviewed annually and may be subject to amendments and revisions in the interim if necessary.

### Priority one - We enable residents to get involved in decision making

Action	By when			Who will lead?
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
Develop and co-ordinate work plans for the HMB, CSP, Housing Forum and Resident Inspectors.	April 2015	April 2016	April 2017	RI Manager
Set up and work with a resident project group looking at involving more residents in a variety of ways.	October 2015			RI Team
Provide and deliver a focussed annual involved customer training programme.	April 2015	April 2016	April 2017	RI Team
Review our tenant expenses policy.	October 2015			RI Team
Provide clear information leaflets on how to get involved.	October 2015			RI Team
Work with a project group to assess incentives for involvement.		March 2016		RI Team
Work with a project group to review effectiveness of local involvement.		March 2016		RI team

### Priority two - Residents have a range of options to get involved at different levels

Action	By when			Who will lead?
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
Assess the suitability of new ways to get involved, including text messaging, face to face consultation, use of events and surveys for specific involved groups and implement deemed appropriate.	April 2016			RI Team
Project manage consultation with housing customers and report regularly on the results.	Ongoing			RI Team
Review involved groups, remit, terms of reference and work plans to ensure value for money and fit for purpose.	January 2016			RI Team
Review Pool membership annually, recruit 10% more members annually and agree the ways people can get involved for the coming year.	Oct 2015	Oct 2016	Oct 2017	RI Team

### Priority three - Meet regulatory requirements and deliver best practice in involvement

Action	By when			Who will lead?
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
Review tenants leading change and develop an action plan. This includes looking at the right to manage, do it yourself and cashback.	Oct 2015	Action plan	Action plan	RI Manager
Work with residents to produce, a tenant annual report Housing Matters.	October 2015	October 2016	October 2017	RI team
Set out a plan to support residents who are interested in the opportunity to take up right to manage.	October 2015			RI Manager
Continue to develop the co-regulatory approach by enhancing the resident inspector programme and linking it to HMB and CSP.		March 2016		RI team

### Priority four - We measure the impact of resident involvement activities

Action	By when			Who will lead?
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	
Provide an update in the tenant annual report, showing the outcomes of involvement during the past year and plans for the future.	October 2015	October 2016	October 2017	RI Team
Ensure a mid-year report is made available to residents on the outcomes of involvement activity	October 2015	October 2016	October 2016	RI Team
Increase resident participation by 10% annually and work towards improving participation by underrepresented groups.	Oct 2015	April 2016	April 2017	RI Team
Identify the benefits and costs of involvement activities annually.	Oct 2015	Oct 2016	Oct 2017	RI Team

## Stevenage's co-operative principles

**In Co-operative Councils local residents play a key role in determining the services needed and how they should be delivered.**

In 2011 the Council formalised their commitment and became a co-operative council.

Listening to residents views and understanding how they want to be involved is key to this joint approach to service design and delivery and the Council has five co-operative principles which reinforce this. These are:

- The Council as a strong community leader
- Working together with the community and other agencies to provide services based on needs
- Communities empowered to design and deliver services and play a role in their local community
- A clear understanding between the Council and our communities – this is what we do, this is what we will help you to do
- Joined-up and accessible services that offer value for money and focus on the customer.

These principles remain just as valid today and form part of this strategy and the action plan projects.

We will encourage partnership working with residents and focus on the services that people want and value. By listening to our customer's views and working together we will demonstrate the dividends and rewards that can be shared by all of us by working together effectively.

More information about the Council's Co-operative Council commitment can be found on [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk)



Top left, clockwise, Customer Scrutiny Panel members Ted Jones, Les Isaacs, Jean Sebastian, Sid Walker, Lesley Storey (Chair) and Doreen Howell.

## Equality and diversity

We want residents from diverse groups to get involved and give us feedback on our services. To do this, it is important that we identify any barriers and work towards making sure all residents can get actively involved.

**To help us achieve this we will:**

- Analyse our performance data to highlight any trends and take action as necessary.
- Use the national census 2011 data to help us make sure the resident involvement service is accessible to all.

- Carry out equality impact assessments to make sure our policies and procedures are not discriminatory in any way.

Where particular needs are identified we will consider setting up consultation and involvement arrangements for specific groups of residents.

## Our Vision

Stevenage: a prosperous town with vibrant communities and improved life chances.

## Our Mission

A flexible council that works with the community to provide value for money services for all and effective support for the most vulnerable.



## Our Values

We are committed to being:



### Straightforward

- ensuring our services are straightforward to use
- not using jargon and complicated terms
- being clear and concise when communicating



### Innovative

- being proactive at every opportunity
- using creative solutions
- working creatively with partners



### Excellent

- delivering services residents need to the highest possible standards
- ensuring we are efficient and effective
- delivering value for money



### Caring

- listening to what residents, partners and others tell us
- responding positively
- respecting everyone we deal with



### One team

- all working together cooperatively to deliver quality services



### Responsive

- taking a “fix first time” approach to customer service matters
- helping people to achieve their ambitions.



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