

**Brighton & Hove City Council**  
**Tenant and Leaseholder**  
**Engagement Strategy**



**Brighton & Hove**  
**City Council**

## Context

The drive for improving tenant and leaseholder engagement is linked to the notion that a collective tenant/leaseholder voice improves the management of homes and ensures value for money for the council and for the residents. Improving housing management is a significant rationale for investing in tenant participation. However, the feedback from engaged Brighton & Hove tenants and leaseholders is often a feeling that despite their involvement they struggle to see change and improvement.

In Brighton and Hove there is a long-established tenant and leaseholder engagement model which has been regularly reviewed over the last 10 years with the purpose of engaging more diverse and a greater number of residents. For the most part the tenant and leaseholder engagement has been carried out through an arrangement of Tenant and Resident Associations, with representatives elected into a formal structure of Service Improvement Groups, City Wide Groups and Area Panels all of which link to the council's Housing Committee (depicted in diagram x in appendix x). Without significant change or additions to this model over the years, there has been little change in the diversity or number of residents involved.

Tenant and leaseholder engagement activities can be seen as happening along a spectrum of involvement, from the provision of information by the council to tenant, from consulting on changes to housing services through to influencing budgets and co-designing new services. Many of these activities are landlord-initiated and take place within formal council structures which often exclude/deter many residents from getting involved. It is important that the council hears from residents outside and alongside these formal structures.

## Introduction

This strategy aims to improve the council's approach to listening to and working with tenants and leaseholders.

It seeks to:

- increase the diversity of residents that we hear from and engage, focusing on young people, Black, Asian and minoritised people, and working age tenants,
- make engagement with the council more appealing, accessible and worthwhile for residents,
- encourage more and different tenants and leaseholders to proactively share their views, ideas and issues

- to support the council to listen openly and have a positive and constructive dialogue with residents
- to develop ways of measuring and evaluating the impact of tenant and leaseholder engagement showing the correlation between involving residents and improved performance in the management of estates and the quality of community life.

The principles of the strategy are to build on the assets that people, and communities already have. To break down barriers that stop the council and residents working together to deliver the best possible council homes and housing services.

An Implementation Plan will be coproduced with tenants and leaseholder to implement and help the council achieve the aims of this strategy.

The progress of the strategy will be reported to tenants and leaseholders through a variety of methods as well as to elected members through the council's Housing Committee.

## **What we know about tenant and leaseholder engagement**

### **Who is involved?**

In Brighton and Hove there is a small number of valued and dedicated tenants and leaseholders who are actively involved in working with the council on improving housing management and services. However, while these people work hard and give huge amounts of their time to being involved in the formal structures, they are a very small percentage of the tenant and leaseholder population - approximately **0.4%** of the total tenant/leaseholder population.

A 2016 review of tenant and leaseholder engagement generated a wide-ranging set of recommendations which included providing more on-line opportunities for involvement and reducing the formal structures. However, only small changes have been achieved.

Changing the culture, practice and structures for engagement has been difficult. There is a level of understandable resistance to change, particularly from the residents who have invested time and energy in the current structures, often for fear change will reduce their influence and voice, and dilute tenant and leaseholder involvement, including reducing space for discussing specific localised issues.

This is not helped by the lack of any widely accepted benchmark or style of good practice across local authorities.

Whilst our involved residents do their best to represent the views of the wider community there is some disparity in representation in relation to the people who are housed within BHCC council homes,

- 90% of engaged residents are over 50 and yet 37% of BHCC tenants are under 50.
- 10% of our tenants identify as part of a minority ethnic group but only a tiny proportion are involved with tenant or leaseholder groups
- We have no under 25s involved in the engagement structures
- We have a significant number of people with disabilities and older people actively involved

### **What is our duty to involve?**

Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985 sets out the legal obligations of a Local Housing Authority for consulting with tenants on 'matters of housing management'. This is supplemented by the government 2017 Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

The 1985 Act states that:

- a. A landlord authority shall maintain such arrangements as it considers appropriate to enable those of its secure tenants who are likely to be substantially affected by a matter of housing management
  - to be informed of the authority's proposals in respect of the matter and
  - to make their views known to the authority within a specified period;
  - and the authority shall, before making any decision on the matter, consider any representations made to it in accordance with those arrangements.
- b. For the purposes of this section, a matter is one of housing management if, in the opinion of the landlord authority, it relates to
  - the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of dwelling-houses let by the authority under secure tenancies, or
  - the provision of services or amenities in connection with such dwelling-houses;
  - but not so far as it relates to the rent payable under a secure tenancy or to charges for services or facilities provided by the authority.
- c. This section applies to matters of housing management which, in the opinion of the landlord authority, represent

- a new programme of maintenance, improvement or demolition, or
- a change in the practice or policy of the authority,
- and are likely substantially to affect either its secure tenants as a whole or a group of them who form a distinct social group or occupy dwelling-houses which constitute a distinct class (whether by reference to the kind of dwelling-house, or the housing estate or other larger area in which they are situated).

### **Who supports tenant and leaseholder involvement?**

The value of engaging with tenants and leaseholders is embedded in the work of every housing team and the culture of partnership and collaboration with tenants and leaseholders across all housing is vital in the successful delivery of this strategy.

In addition, the council's Community Engagement Team is a cross tenure team that is specifically aimed at supporting resident engagement with council services including the council as a landlord. The team supports a collaborative relationship between residents and services and supports tenant and leaseholder associations to develop and to be involved in the housing management structures.

The Community Engagement workers are area-based and develop strong relationships with the Tenants and Leaseholder Associations and groups. As part of their role, they advocate for the needs and priorities of Tenant and Leaseholder Associations and groups, promoting these priorities with other council services and supporting them to respond or communicate directly with the groups. The team also works with groups to build the groups' capacity and confidence in dealing directly with the council, to support them to develop priorities and bid for funding to deliver projects that benefit their communities.

The Community Engagement Team are developing a wider role to support and deliver detailed consultation on behalf of housing and other services. This will include reaching out to minority communities and having specialist engagement workers within the team who can build trusting relationships with specific marginalised groups.

### **Ward Councillors**

Ward councillors also play a significant role as democratically elected local representatives. The ward councillors engage with residents and groups on a wide range of different issues and take on an important community leadership role often providing a bridge between the community and the council. As well as being an advocate for the local residents and signposting them to the right people the councillors also keep them informed about the issues that affect them. Councillors build strong relationships and encourage local people to make their views known and engage the council. They often know and work with know and work

with representatives of local organisations, interest groups and businesses, representing their views at council meetings and leading local campaigns on their behalf.

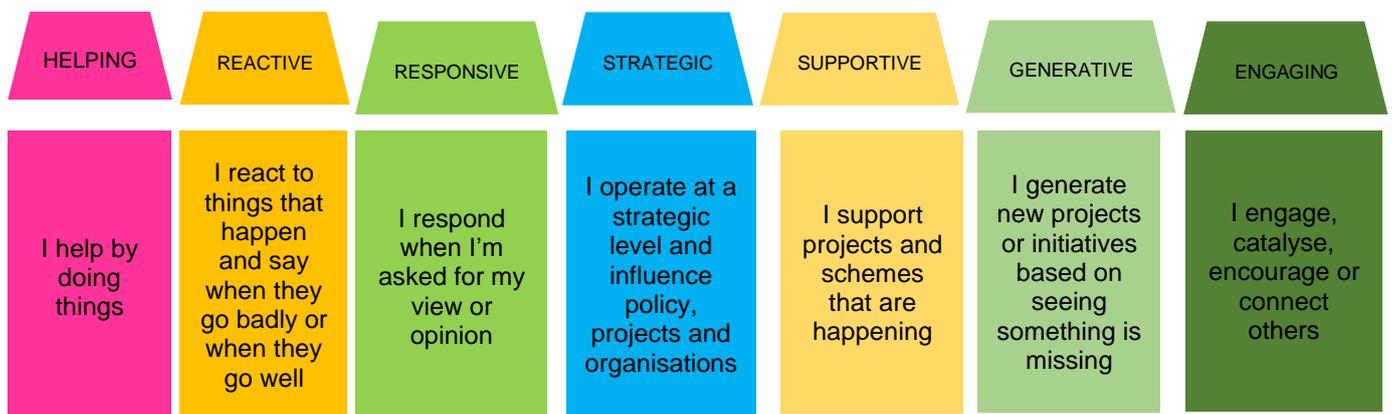
- This Strategy sets out to build on this work and put in place an enhanced framework to strengthen and widen the opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to be engaged with the council as their landlord.
- To monitor improvements in satisfaction with housing management and residents perceptions of the quality of community life as a result of this engagement

## Key Principles

1. *Strength based* – recognising and developing a culture that builds on the strengths, skills and experience of tenants and leaseholders
2. *Co-production* – the most effective way of bringing about improvements and outcomes is with tenants/leaseholder and the council co-designing solutions
3. *Communicate* – the council has a responsibility to consult and share information in an open and timely manner -
4. *Equality, diversity and inclusion* – recognising the communities that are not currently being heard and do not have a voice and targeting some of our resources to work with these specific groups, and not just those who shout the loudest/know how the system works
5. *Community-led* – where possible, enabling tenants/leaseholders to set the agenda, define local priorities and develop local solutions
6. *Open to challenge* - remembering that we are striving for the best and challenging ourselves and others to achieve this is essential
7. *Thinking creatively* - using a wide range of methods and tools, exploring new and innovative approaches including funding and technology to ensure we are reaching as many people as possible
8. *Partnership and collaboration* – working in cross-cutting ways with a range of services, ward councillors and partners to find new solutions to ‘sticky’ issues
9. *Monitoring achievements* - considering satisfaction with how the service is managed and levels of positivity residents feel about their community

## Styles of engagement

To engage communities in a meaningful and valuable way we must ensure we are offering a range of opportunities that are; interesting, rewarding and accomplishing. We need to maintain enthusiasm and build trusting, open relationships. Different people want to be involved in different ways. The diagram below helps us to consider the type of engagement opportunities we can offer to engage different people in the ways that give them value and satisfaction.



## **New Tools and Approaches**

To reach more diverse and a greater number of tenants and leaseholders our activities will be focused on three types of engagement and use a range of engagement tools.

We will focus on:

- proactive engagement
- responsive engagement
- structural engagement

We will use:

- participatory budgeting opportunities
- digital tools

A shift in the balance of resources across these three types of approaches will be required to enable the council to reach tenants and leaseholders who have not previously shared their views, ideas and opinions with us.

We will make some small changes to the current structures taking the service improvement groups from four to two, these will focus on 'People and 'Buildings. This will allow us to have time limited task and finish groups to focus on specific issues in detail and report back to Area Panels.

## **Proactive Engagement**

Proactive engagement helps the council to build relationships with people that often do not wish to or cannot attend formal meetings. It reaches the people who are unaware/not interested in the formal opportunities to be involved with council services. It also supports people to engage with each other and develop new ideas, projects and activities within their communities. This approach enables people to get involved or express their views in a more informal way.

## Proactive Engagement

Activities	Aim
Door knocking Pop up or mini events Questionnaires' and surveys Social media and online groups/meeting Attending existing groups and activities Events, art and culture Fun days Networking and workshops Learning and training Community led events and activities Participatory budgeting with the state Development Budget and with the Environmental Improvement Budget	To ensure residents can participate in engagement activities that work for them  To build trusting relationships with local communities  To develop insight and understanding about communities and their priorities  To support resident to develop community projects and bid for funds to achieve these

## Responsive Engagement

Responsive engagement supports council services to get feedback from residents. This approach helps services to develop a better understanding of local priorities and to take more appropriate and relevant actions. It also supports communities to develop their own ideas, activities and services.

Activities	Aim
Support for services to consult and engage on specific issues Provide area-based teams with Community Development partners to offer a complete package of engagement and development support to communities, neighbourhood groups residents, tenants and leaseholders To provide engagement workshops, facilitation or events to engage communities in council services Provide digital and online communication channels To enable and support ward councillors to work with communities Developing and implementing Neighbourhood Action Plans	To provide a complete area-based offer for council services, ward councillors and residents to work together on identifying and responding to city wide and local issues  To support a wide range of council and housing services to speak to tenants and leaseholders about specific issues /consultations

## Structural Engagement

Structural engagement is the most formal engagement. It supports detailed involvement with strategic issues, the development of services, procurement of goods and enables the sharing, scrutiny and evaluation of council policy and practice.

Activities	Aim
Provide support to area-based representative groups including LATs, Neighbourhood Forums Support to the Tenant and Leaseholder structures Support and develop the Tenant and Leaseholder grass roots groups Provide guidance and support to the tenants and leaseholders Ensure there are diverse and inclusive opportunities for involvement within these structures To work with city-wide communities of identity to engage them in neighbourhood working and housing management	To support communities to have a voice in the development of council and public services policy and practice  To ensure the council is delivering on its statutory duties to engage  To improve the delivery and quality of housing services and maintenance

## Engagement Tools

### Digital engagement

Formal meetings tend to capture the opinions of a small but skilled section of the tenant and resident population. We will explore the use of newer digital platforms – beyond Facebook, Instagram and Twitter which the council already uses – that offer the ability to reach broader audiences, often over many weeks.

This type of technology, like others can be used to provide information, get reactions, responses and enable debate, it can also link into social media in a more targeted way and help engage residents that don't traditionally participate in housing issues.

These methods would not replace traditional meetings rather they are a significant additional tool to reach often the city's younger and more diverse residents.

## **Participatory Budgeting**

Participatory budgeting is a process of democratic negotiation and decision-making, in which ordinary people decide how to allocate part of a public budget. Participatory budgeting allows residents to identify, discuss, and prioritise public spending projects, and gives them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent.

PB processes are typically designed to involve those left out of traditional methods of public engagement, such as low-income residents, and young people.

Evidence of both the successes and failures of participatory budgeting has suggested that it often results in more equitable public spending, greater transparency and accountability, increased levels of public participation, especially by marginalized or poorer residents.

The Current Estate Development Budget (EDB) is a unique and valuable means to engage and empower residents. It is an annual fund made available to tenants and leaseholders (as either formal or informal groups) to improve their quality of life.

The EDB is bid for by local groups and has a resident decision-making panel that evaluate and decide on the bids so to some extent uses participatory methods for all its decisions.

An internal audit of the EDB process in 2018 found partial assurance in the process; 'weaknesses in the system of control and/or the level of non-compliance is such as to put the achievement of the system or service objectives at risk'.

A resident led EDB review group consisting of residents drawn from the EDB Panel, Area Panels, Service Improvement Groups met to consider:

- How to make EDB easier to understand and use
- To find ways to shorten the main bid process from application to the point of delivery
- Introduce new processes to encourage more and varied bids
- Ensure the processes are fair and equitable.
- Strengthen the understanding and guidelines for the bidding especially defining the difference between an improvement and maintenance



A series of recommendations were put forward many of which have now been implemented. A specific recommendation was for the council to provide a 'community chest' which could fund revenue projects, for example, community fitness classes, arts and crafts groups, homework clubs, ICT classes within community rooms and/or on open space.

Therefore, EDB will be amended to allow tenants and leaseholders to bid for revenue and capital projects.

The Environmental Improvement Budget (EIB) is an additional fund that aims to be respond quickly to local issues, improving the quality and appeal of the open space and the physical environment. Resident are able to feed in views and priorities for EIB through the Community Engagement Team or other housing officers.

Housing Revenue Account consultations will also be considered within the Implementation Plan for the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy. We will consider how we can use participatory budgeting methods in all of these funds to engage more residents in setting priorities, bidding for funds and supporting decision making on how funding is spent across HRA, EIB, and EDB. This will take many forms which will include sharing information and promoting the funds, supporting groups to bid, exploring participatory budgeting with online voting elements, using digital platforms and social media to engage a much wider group of tenants and residents.

### **Housing Communities**

Within the housing population we have a range of 'communities' who have specific needs and requirements.

### **Seniors**

We are working with the Seniors housing team to expand and review the engagement with residents in senior schemes. This is again currently limited to very small numbers of people. The principles in this strategy mean we will take a different approach where we build on the interests and skills of the seniors residents to engage them in decision-making about their homes but also to support them to develop activities and projects that will improve the quality of their lives.

### **Leaseholders**

There is a separate Leaseholder Engagement Strategy that was approved at Housing Committee in June 2018. The actions stated in the Leaseholder Engagement Strategy will be incorporated into the Implementation Plan for this broader Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Strategy.

The Leaseholder Engagement is supported in a number of ways.

- Leaseholder Action Group
- A dedicated Senior Leaseholder Liaison officer

- Involvement in the other formal engagement channels such as resident associations, Area Panels and Service Improvement Groups
- Task and finish groups

Most often tenant and leaseholders have a common interest in the enjoyment of a good quality home, ensuring value for money and having a say in the services they receive. However, there are issues specific to leaseholders such as the cost of major works and billing that require leaseholder engagement only. These will continue to be addressed through the Leaseholder Action Group. Additional proactive ways of reaching other leaseholders will also be explored as part of the wider range of engagement approaches set out in this strategy.

### **Minority communities: tenants with disabilities, Black, Asian and minoritized people, LGBT Q+, residents in emergency and temporary accommodation**

There are several other communities which we want to hear more from; that have very specific issues that we need to understand better and respond more effectively to. We will use the principles, approaches and tools detailed in this strategy to develop new work with these communities. We will focus on developing projects that will engage residents in temporary and emergency accommodation, Black, Asian and minoritized tenants and tenants with disabilities. Annually, we will review who we have listened to and whose voices still do not have a platform and refocus our attention as required.

### **How this strategy will be delivered**

A three-year Implementation Plan will be co-designed with tenants and leaseholders which will put this strategy into action. The Implementation Plan will define and set out the outcomes and priorities in the context of specific communities of identity, and areas of the city.

We will work with a range of stakeholders both within housing and across the council to encourage all services to commit to their role in the delivery of these actions, with the aim of improving trust and collaboration between the council and the tenants and leaseholders and cultivating new ways of working together to provide the best quality housing services.

The Implementation Plan will be reported to Area Panels on an annual basis starting in April/May.

### **Conclusion**

The move towards a collaborative and broader engagement approach focused on strengths reflects the desire to enable people and communities to bring and share their personal skills, knowledge and experiences. To value tenant and leaseholder engagement in a positive way and view issues as opportunities where possible and developed shared approaches to solutions.

