

Housing Resident Involvement Strategy

2024-2027



Foreword by Cllr Paul Kelly

As the Lead Member for Housing, I particularly welcome not only the recently passed Social Housing (regulation) Act 2023 into law, but also the introduction of the standards that puts our tenants and leaseholders at the very heart of everything we do.

I consider this long overdue and thanks to the strict Regulator requirements, ensures this change is not just lip service or a tick box exercise for housing providers, but provides a genuine mechanism for improvement. It feels like a very real change that concentrates more on actions and less on excuses.

Slough Borough Council has to date approximately 7,300 properties, made up of 6,000 tenanted homes and 1,300 leaseholders, who all have a voice that should be considered. The purpose of this strategy is to lay out how we, as a council, aim to engage with our tenants and our commitment to shaping the service in a more transparent and accountable way.

Resident surveys to date have been rightfully critical of our standards, our ability to complete repairs effectively and engage with residents in a meaningful way. These are the initial views that we must use as a base line for what we do not aim to become again, as a housing provider.

Undertaking impartial resident surveys ahead of the regulation change in April 2024, has meant that we have been able to have a very honest view of the current service and take stock of the challenges ahead of time. We know that we could do better, we know that residents deserve better and this strategy for housing resident involvement, sets out how we plan to engage and listen to our residents going forward. This strategy also sets out what residents can expect from the Housing Service and where it can and will be held accountable by the Housing Regulator for poor practice from 2024.

These external drivers for change have been welcomed by the council as it gives us a clearer framework of standards to work within, at the risk of punitive actions if we do not. From how we engage with residents, to how we maintain homes, carry out repairs and communicate better - the expectations of how we operate as a landlord are now regulated and we will be held accountable, as we should be. We should be delivering what we promise, within realistic timeframes and with continual communication with residents as an absolute minimum.

For me, the involvement strategy really underpins everything that will come next - with the support of the Residents Board, who will have a much closer relationship with our housing teams and myself, as Lead Member. The strategy strengthens the Board's influence on the real changes and decision making that will shape the service now and in the future.

I would like to see more residents recruited to the board from different age groups, with incentive schemes and skills development opportunities made available to them. It is this true engagement with residents with real lived experience of the service, that I feel will provide a better focus on what is important and will help get us to where we should be as a responsible, transparent, and proactive housing provider. The real feedback, good or bad, enables us to be proactive to the issues that matter most, like timely repairs, tackling anti-social behaviour and improving neighbourhood safety. I want to see actual change happening - clear, realistic improvements that show a clear benefit to our residents.

The involvement strategy will ensure meaningful opportunities for more residents to influence housing services, policies and strategies that impact you as tenants and leaseholders.

I am optimistic about what the council can learn from this new strategy, by placing the resident voice at the centre, and I believe that this should be a positive driver for change. That is the ethos of the service I want us to build, together.

It is very important to me that this strategy gives residents some reassurance of what our plan is going forward and our commitment to offering the best service we can - with no excuses, to our residents. This is paramount and to have them really being part of the drivers for change can only lead to a service that we can all be proud of.



Comments from Resident Board members

This was an interactive piece of work which was produced jointly with SBC staff.

The joint working created understanding between the Resident Board members and the council.

The strategy allowed the voice of residents to be heard and understood, allowing us to shape the decisions that will affect us.

The council is accountable to us and wants to work with residents to improve their lives and experiences. This is an ideal time to get involved to make a difference to lives within Slough, by becoming a Resident Board member or joining estate inspections.

As members of the Resident Board, we actively participated in the development of the Resident Involvement Strategy.

This is an exciting development which will allow more residents to become involved, bringing the strategy to life. Your contribution will be most welcome.

Going forward, the policy will allow the residents to express their opinions and work with the council to influence decisions that will impact them. There will be a range of ways available, (dependent on time) for residents to manage this.

They valued our opinions allowing staff to understand the experience of residents and how the service can be improved.

The strategy was well written, and the use of diagrams was effective in making it easier to understand.

By Bushra R

This is a good strategy and should lead to substantially improved council and resident relationships

By Trevor P

Glossary of key terms

Consumer Standards - the standards set expectations that social housing landlords must meet and that the Regulator of Social Housing will seek assurance against.

Housing staff - includes all Slough staff who work in the Housing part of the Housing, Property and Planning Directorate. This includes staff who manage the tenancies and leaseholds; staff who deal with the repairs contract; and resident engagement staff.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) - regulates registered providers of social housing in England. They want the social housing sector to be viable, efficient, well governed, and able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs.

Residents - refers to tenants and leaseholders.

Tenant Satisfaction measures (TSMs) - social housing landlords must collect and publish annually from April 2024 so their residents are well informed about their landlord's performance in managing their homes and neighbourhoods. There are 22 tenant satisfaction measures, 10 of these will be measured by landlords directly, and 12 will be measured by landlords via tenant perception surveys.

Tenant Participation and Advisory Service (TPAS) - is a UK-based organisation that works to ensure tenants and leaseholders of social housing have access to advice and support to help them understand their rights and responsibilities.

NEC - is a comprehensive, flexible Housing Management platform, providing a 360° view of customers and assets. It drives automation across housing management, repairs and asset management, supporting safe communities and ensuring compliance.



Introduction

Our vision and priorities

The council recently reviewed its approach and priorities and is introducing our refreshed Corporate Plan, focused on closing the healthy life expectancy (see below). Delivering affordable, safe and healthy homes is key to our purpose and this Resident Involvement Strategy aligns well with our approach to be **resident focused**. The disruption which resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic and our financial situation has had a deep and far-reaching impact on service delivery and our residents. The refreshed approach will ensure we better serve the residents of Slough, responding to their concerns, ensuring their views are heard and delivering on the issues that matter most to residents.

What is resident involvement and why it is important?

- How we find out what matters to our tenants and leaseholders (listen) and act to ensure safe and well-maintained homes.

- Meaningful ways that residents work closely with us to examine and influence the plans, policies and services that affect them.
- How we provide accessible support that meets the diverse needs of our tenants and leaseholders to reduce barriers to involvement.
- Support and assistance for tenant and resident led activities to influence our plans, policies and services.

The tragedies of Grenfell and the death of Awaab Ishak provide a few examples of the failures of landlords to listen and act on the concerns raised by residents. Therefore, resident involvement is about **transparency, accountability and resident Influence** which leads to **service improvement and safe homes for residents**. We are accountable to our tenants and leaseholders and this Housing Resident involvement Strategy will ensure we provide more meaningful opportunities for residents to influence services, policies and strategy that impacts them. We want to work more closely with residents to put things right quickly and put residents at the heart of key housing services' decision making.

Refreshing our Corporate Plan

Our purpose

Closing the health life expectancy gap, by focussing on children

Our approach

- Resident focussed
- Providing financial sustainability
- Enabling residents and communities
- Strengthening partnerships
- Building trust

Our priorities

1. A borough for children and young people to thrive
2. A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives
3. A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough

External drivers for change - Strengthening resident engagement

- Following the Grenfell tragedy, the Government published its Social Housing White Paper to strengthen the accountability of landlords for maintaining good quality homes and services, prioritising safety, treating residents with respect and being transparent organisations.
- The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 became law in July 2023. This Act incorporates the requirements outlined in the Social Housing White Paper.
- The Act has provided the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) additional powers, with the ability to give unlimited fines, short-notice inspections and orders to carry out repairs.
- Social landlords must meet new consumer standards from April 2024, with the purpose of strengthening tenants' rights and ensuring better quality and safer homes for residents.
- The Regulator uses a co-regulatory approach meaning Boards and Councillors are responsible for meeting the regulatory standards.
- The Building Safety Act requires a Resident Engagement Strategy for high-rise buildings to give residents more say in how their building is kept safe.

1. The Safety and Quality Standard

requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.

2. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints, when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.

Proposed Consumer Standards from April 2024 by RSH

3. The Neighbourhood and Community Standard

requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.

4. The Tenancy Standard

Sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.

The most critical standard for this strategy is two, although all are important and interlink.

Methodology

During the month of July and August 2023, residents, relevant teams and our repairs contractor, Osborne, provided input which has been used to develop our approach in this strategy. The following summarises the various methods used to involve all these key stakeholders.

Resident Involvement

- Interviews with six Resident Board members and the independent chair
- Four drop-in sessions at Langley, Chalvey, The Curve and Britwell
- Online focus group
- *Online survey 4-31 August with 52 participants



Staff Involvement

Focus groups and interviews with:

- 10 housing staff including three team leaders
- 15 staff in the Customer Services Team
- Head of Communities and the Community Development Team
- Associate Director for Housing
- Cllr Puja Bedi, Lead for Housing
- The Senior Participation Officer
- The Neighbourhood Manager

Interview with four staff from Osborne including:

- Repairs Contract Account Manager
- Project Manager for Major Works
- Compliance Manager



Repairs contractor

*Majority of residents views were from online survey and Resident Board members

What residents told us



Resident Board

Concerns

- Low confidence in the council due to poor performance.
- Feeling of being used as a tick box and not heard.
- Lack of influence in all key housing services decisions that impact residents.

Priorities

- Strengthen Board's influence in key housing services decisions, with clear structure that involves working more closely with senior officers and councillors.
- Transparency and follow-through - improvement plan and regular update on progress.
- Incentive scheme and skills development for current and future members.
- Recruitment of more residents onto the Board.

Residents' feedback from the survey

Concerns

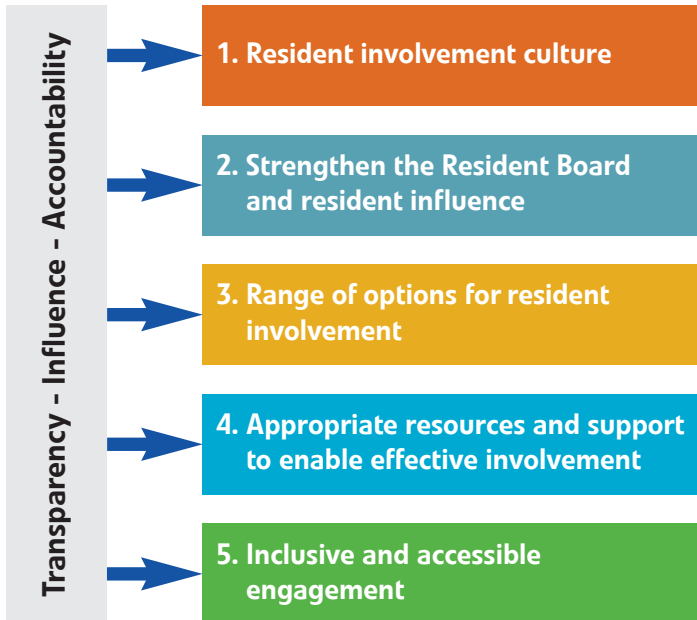
- Low satisfaction with repairs service and handling of ASB.
- Residents feeling that their views are not heard and when they are, not acted upon.
- Difficulty with contacting or getting a response from housing staff.
- Lack of transparency and poor communication about housing related matters.

Priorities

- Effective handling of complaints and communication throughout the process.
- Improve repairs service and communicate how we plan to do this with regular updates to residents.
- Meaningful engagement - view residents as experts of their homes and involve them in shaping services, policies and strategies that impact them.
- Maintain building and neighbourhood safety.
- Act on what residents are telling us and be transparent about why we may not be able to do some things.
- Show empathy and timely respond to resident enquiries, providing updates until issues raised are resolved.
- Neighbourhood level involvement such as joint estate inspections with residents and resident-led activities.
- Provide opportunities for resident scrutiny projects to enable service improvements influenced by evidence-based recommendations.

Resident involvement strategy themes

Our strategy is based on the following five themes:



Theme 1 Resident involvement culture

We want a culture where genuine consideration of residents' views is at the heart of all our decision-making about the delivery of housing services. Creating such culture will involve every housing staff member, including the repairs contract team and councillors, taking the approach of *'Nothing about residents without residents.'* In addition, we will:

- include a resident involvement section on every Resident Board, internal report and the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee report to embed consideration of residents' views in our decision-making
- support the development and production of a council wide engagement toolkit to enable all our staff, contractors and councillors to embed effective resident involvement in our work
- include commitment and responsibility for involvement in the role description, objectives and performance reviews of all our housing staff, including senior staff

- seek input from our residents when developing activities and initiatives and include a resident involvement section on the agenda for every team meeting
- have staff and Councillor champions to help drive change
- have regular progress reporting to the Resident Board about our resident involvement activities
- record all housing resident involvement activities/consultation in a central location
- work with teams across the council for an effective, consistent and coordinated approach to engagement in accordance with the Council's community engagement strategy.

Theme 2 Strengthen the Resident Board and resident influence

We are accountable to residents who live in the homes we manage. They play a key role in ensuring we provide safe and well-maintained homes. We want to empower them to scrutinise our services and influence decisions that affect them. We will do this by:

- strengthening our co-regulation approach by improving the links between the Resident Board, lead councillor for housing and the new Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (see our new Resident Involvement Structure on page 7)
- strengthen our Resident Board panel by recruiting new members and assess the training and support needs of members. We will provide the training and resources to meet needs identified
- raising awareness of our TPAS membership and benefits to residents in terms of access to informative resources, events, forums involving other tenants and training relating to social housing and resident involvement. This will strengthen residents' knowledge, understanding and skills to keep us accountable
- providing the Resident Board and councillors a range of ways to listen to the resident views and learn from their lived experiences
- ensuring all housing services related policy reviews and strategies consider the views of residents and implications for residents of any changes

- involving residents in procurement of key services such as repairs, including specifying contract requirements, short-listing companies from tenders received, conducting interviews and site visits, and appointing the successful contractor
- using the annual report and the Housing Highlights newsletter to communicate the impact of resident involvement. Where appropriate we will use 'You said, we did' method.

Theme 3 Range of options for resident involvement

We currently have one primary resident involvement opportunity in the form of the Resident Board. We want to provide more involvement opportunities that offer flexibility so residents can be involved to the level and degree they choose (see our new Resident Involvement Structure below). Based on what residents told us from the survey, we will involve them using their preferred approach below during the life of this strategy.

- **Neighbourhood involvement** - joint estate inspections and walkabouts with residents, support and involve tenant and resident led groups, building safety

champion or complaint advocate initiatives to ensure safe neighbourhoods and effective handling of complaints. In addition, door knocking, and local resident meetings will be used to engage older residents, those with mobility issue or those that prefer this approach.

- **Scrutiny projects** - work with a group of residents for a set time to examine one aspect of our service, to identify what works well and what we can do better. We will aim to recruit residents that reflect the diversity of Slough and include young people.
- **Annual residents' event** - weekend event with an opportunity for residents to meet and engage with teams from the council, in particular housing, repairs contractor, community safety and community development. Residents will have access to information about housing services as well as support services and have a say about upcoming plans and projects.
- **Virtual involvement** - an opportunity for residents to get involved on the go or at home, at their convenience on topics that matter to them. Examples of this include an online survey, mystery shopping and online focus groups. This approach can be used for engaging young people and leaseholders.

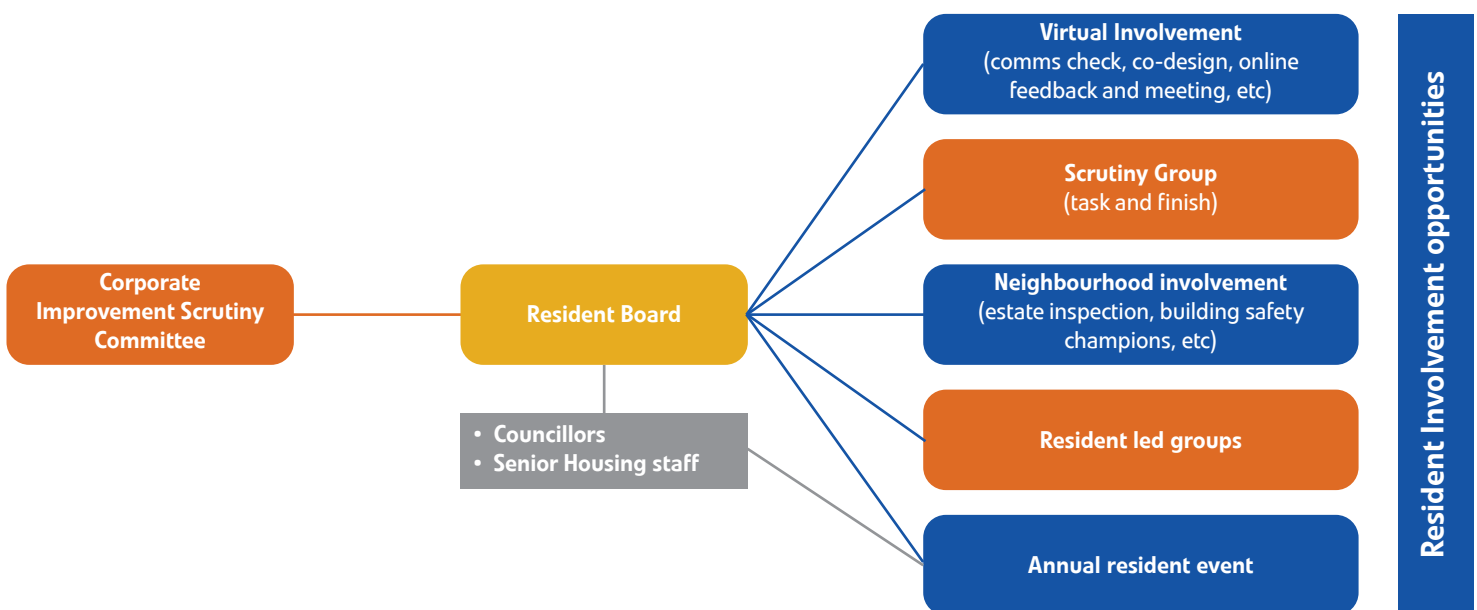


Figure: Resident Involvement Structure

Theme 4 Appropriate resources and support to enable effective involvement

Over the years, resources have withdrawn from resident involvement. We want to invest sufficient resources and appropriate support to deliver effective resident involvement and continually improve our approach. We will do this by:

- establishing a resident involvement team, led by a manager, with three officers and a support officer
- providing regular communication to residents on activities, changes and development of resident engagement
- delivering training or awareness sessions for housing staff including the RMI contract team to ensure all have a good understanding of effective resident involvement and maximise the use of our TPAS membership to keep up to date with best practice
- supporting residents' groups with skill development, advice and financial support to deliver our common aims. Ensure independent advice is available to groups if they want it through our TPAS membership
- exploring the use of existing housing systems, such as the NEC, to understand our residents better, their communication preference and involve more residents effectively
- providing dedicated financial resources, including provision of incentives to recognise residents' time, equipment, travel, training, and conferences to support effective involvement for those who require it.

Theme 5 Inclusive and accessible engagement

We will ensure that in delivering our new Resident Involvement Strategy, we are inclusive and do everything in our control to reduce barriers to involvement for our diverse residents. We will do this by:

- improving our understanding of our residents' profile, languages spoken and needs of those living with disabilities to ensure they are not excluded in our communication and engagement
- using a range of communication channels to reach our diverse tenants and leaseholders, including consideration for younger and older residents as well as those whose first language is not English
- delivering involvement activities at different times and locations to ensure as many residents as possible have the access to involvement
- offering a mix of digital and face to face meetings, events and activities
- working with wider council teams, especially the Youth Voice team to develop our approach to effectively involving young people and the Youth Parliament, as well as the community development team and community organisations to support improved involvement of under-represented groups
- ensuring that involved residents are representative of the demography of our residents.

What next?

This strategy will be delivered over a three-year period with our first year focused on laying a good foundation and building on that in the subsequent years. We will develop our action plan with input from the Resident Board to detail what we are delivering in year one and agree a method for evaluating our progress and impact.

Measuring success

We will work with our Resident Board and in accordance with the tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) by the Regulator for Social Housing, we will set annual performance targets for resident involvement. As a result of delivering on our commitments over the life of this strategy, success looks like:

- increased opportunities and support for residents' voice to be heard
- increased number of involved residents representative of the Slough community, influencing service improvements
- evidence of increased resident satisfaction in relation to listening and acting upon their views (TSM)
- Resident Board and other involved residents feeling that their involvement is meaningful and making a difference
- housing staff actively seeking resident involvement on any decision that impacts them
- clear outcomes demonstrating the impact of resident involvement activities
- younger tenants have a voice.

How success will be measured

- Key performance indicators including the number of involvement opportunities, number of residents involved and satisfaction with involvement.
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) result relating to resident engagement.
- Annual review of the progress and impact of the Resident Involvement Strategy with staff, Board and other involved residents, using surveys and feedback from engagement activities.
- Appraisal of the corporate culture and performance in relation to resident involvement and to what extent the Board thinks the council takes them seriously at the end of the strategy.

How will we communicate our progress?

- Report progress at every Resident Board meeting.
- Regular internal communication to staff and lead Councillor for housing.
- Provide six monthly updates on progress to Cabinet.
- Provide updates in the Housing Highlights newsletter.
- Annual report to include involvement outcomes, demonstrating accountability to residents.
- Publish progress on the Resident Involvement webpage.



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