

# Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy 2015-18

## Section One

### Introduction

Harlow Council housing stock includes leaseholders as well as tenants and their partners and/or families. As our neighbourhoods and estates often contain a mix of tenants, leaseholders and owner-occupiers we want to involve as many of them as possible in order to understand and meet their concerns. We recognise that the same issues often affect all people living within a community and these may vary greatly between wards and communities within wards.

### Context

Tenants and leaseholders want to receive a good service that represents good value for money, with the ability to contribute and reshape future services. We recognise that some tenants and leaseholders do not want to be part of involvement activities, with rent payment being the limit of the involvement that they want with us.

We view involvement as being the opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to give their views and have their voices heard on housing service issues and empowerment as being about giving tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to hold Housing Services, as their landlord, to account.

For the purposes of this strategy the following definitions will apply:

**A Tenant** is a Harlow Council Tenant OR an adult member of a tenant's family residing in that property.

**A Leaseholder is** a Leaseholder of Harlow Council resident in the property the Lease describes

This strategy is about how involvement and empowerment could be delivered by Housing Services and the Council.

The way Housing Services develops its approach will depend on tenants and leaseholders, resources and the ability of Housing Services to act on the views of its tenants and leaseholders. There is however, a legislative expectation that tenant and leaseholder involvement is embedded in our work.

As a social landlord we have to comply with a set of standards set out by the regulator for social housing; the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

The Homes and Communities Agency 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard' states that landlords shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- The formulation of housing related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- The scrutiny of performance and making recommendations about how performance might be improved
- The management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, and the sharing in savings made
- Agreeing local offers for service delivery.

A lack of compliance with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard is unlikely to trigger sanctions, but will impact on the relationship Housing Services has with its customers.

Traditionally a lot of involvement activity by social housing landlords is focused around a small number of individuals and is reactive rather than proactive. We have recognised that our routine involvement routes by their nature focus on a small number of users and that traditional participation structures such as formal meetings have tended to attract older tenants and leaseholders. This strategy aims to widen involvement choices for tenants and leaseholders.

The Harlow Council Corporate Plan highlights seven priorities for the next three years of which housing is a key priority. The priorities are:

- 1 More and better housing
- 2 Regenerating the town and supporting a thriving economy
- 3 A clean, green and sustainable environment
- 4 Successful young people and improving citizenship
- 5 Promoting social inclusion
- 6 Providing community leadership and good governance
- 7 Sound resource management

Housing Services has a service plan, linked to the Council Corporate Plan, which details that increasing tenant and leaseholder involvement is a Housing Service priority.

## Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy aims and objectives

### *Vision and aims*

Our vision is to make a difference to our tenants and leaseholders homes and communities, and give them the opportunity to influence change and improvement. Ensuring this is a major part of housing service delivery improvements and decision-making. Our strategy will support the delivery of this housing service aim.

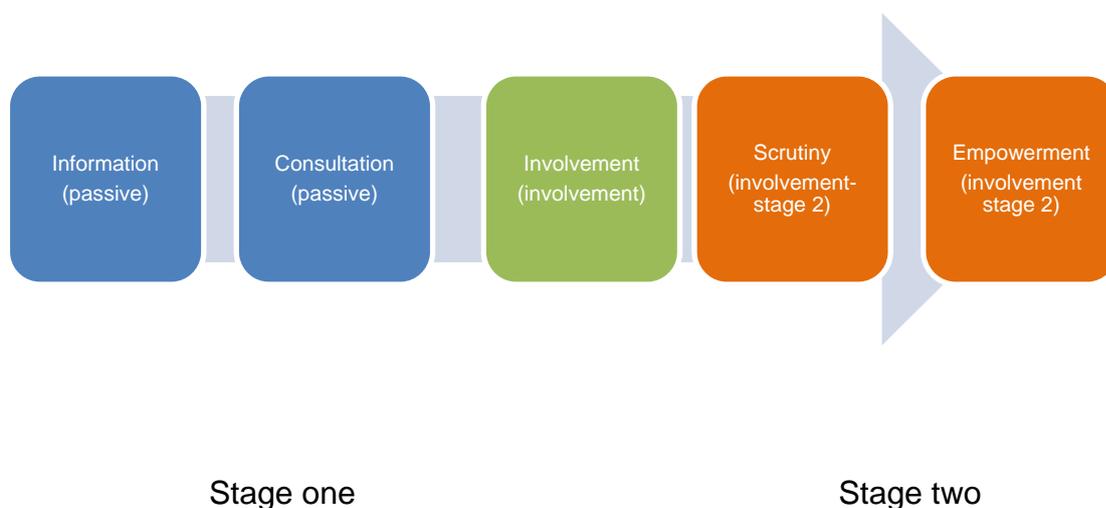
Our previous tenant and leaseholder involvement agreement was successful in establishing a range of mechanisms for involvement such as formal tenant and leaseholder panel involvement groups. However, from our review into the impact of this involvement, it is clear that this has meant we were involving and engaging with relatively small numbers of tenants and leaseholders from our communities. There was limited pro-active promotion or use of other non-formal routes for involvement and under represented groups had not been encouraged to get involved with the housing service.

We understand that tenants and leaseholders want more passive opportunities to shape our services, which do not need a significant time commitment, and which fit into their existing lifestyles. We want to be pro-active in providing greater choice of involvement activity. We would then be in a position to achieve our aim of ensuring more tenants and leaseholders' voices are heard as we engage with a more representative range of tenants and leaseholders.

### *Strategic objectives*

Our strategic objectives for tenant and leaseholder engagement are grounded in the spectrum of involvement, which ranges from passive to active involvement as shown below:

#### Transition from Passive to Involved to Empowered via a staged approach



Our strategy for 2015–2018 is called the Harlow Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy, and demonstrates our intention to rely less on formal involvement methods and to focus more on building up ways which support Tenants and Leaseholders to have greater choice in the ways in which they choose to engage with us. Our approach to achieving our strategic objectives are based on a two stage process with improvements to Information; Consultation and Involvement being focused in stage one of the process and Scrutiny and Empowerment development in stage two of the process.

This strategy sets out how we intend to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase involvement opportunities (stage one)
- Increase the number and representativeness of involved tenants and leaseholders (stage one)
- Improve information and communication provided (stage one)
- Influence strategic decisions (stage two)
- Hold Housing Services to account (stage two)
- Compliance with the HCA consumer standards (stage one and two)

## **Section Two**

### ***Where are we now?***

A Tenant and Leaseholder Participation Agreement document dated 2012 informed the structure of involvement and the Harlow's ambition with regard to tenant participation activity. This included an independent triennial review of the agreement.

Following a recent review of this agreement and the engagement framework we identified that we needed to restructure the tenant and leaseholder engagement structure to ensure that the framework, by which we engage with tenants and leaseholders, demonstrates that it is representative of our communities and is fit for purpose, both for the council and its tenants and leaseholders.

### ***Responsibility for Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement***

The responsibility for tenant and leaseholder involvement lies with everyone who forms part of Housing Services delivery, from front line customer services staff to senior management, the Head of Housing Services, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Councillors.

Tenants, leaseholders, staff and elected members work together to deliver information about and promote tenant and leaseholder involvement, with all staff receiving training about their role in developing and promoting tenant and leaseholder involvement.

The Housing Standards Board (HSB) is required to consider and approve this Strategy and has responsibility for its implementation and overall direction, which will be reviewed every three years. The HSB is responsible, together with the Housing Services team, for monitoring performance of the strategy and its accompanying action plan and making recommendations, where appropriate, for improving performance.

All Harlow Housing Services staff are responsible for ensuring that our tenants and leaseholders are involved in influencing service delivery and decision-making. Key Performance targets are linked to this strategy and supported by the Housing Service Delivery Plan. Managers are responsible for monitoring staff performance against these targets through one-to-ones' and annual appraisals. Managers will support staff to achieve these targets.

Managers and staff will attend and support tenants and leaseholders meetings as appropriate and will proactively promote opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to be involved, supporting and encouraging tenants and leaseholders to be empowered.

The Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement team will provide advice, guidance and training for staff to assist in their promotion of tenant and leaseholder involvement.

### ***Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Service delivery***

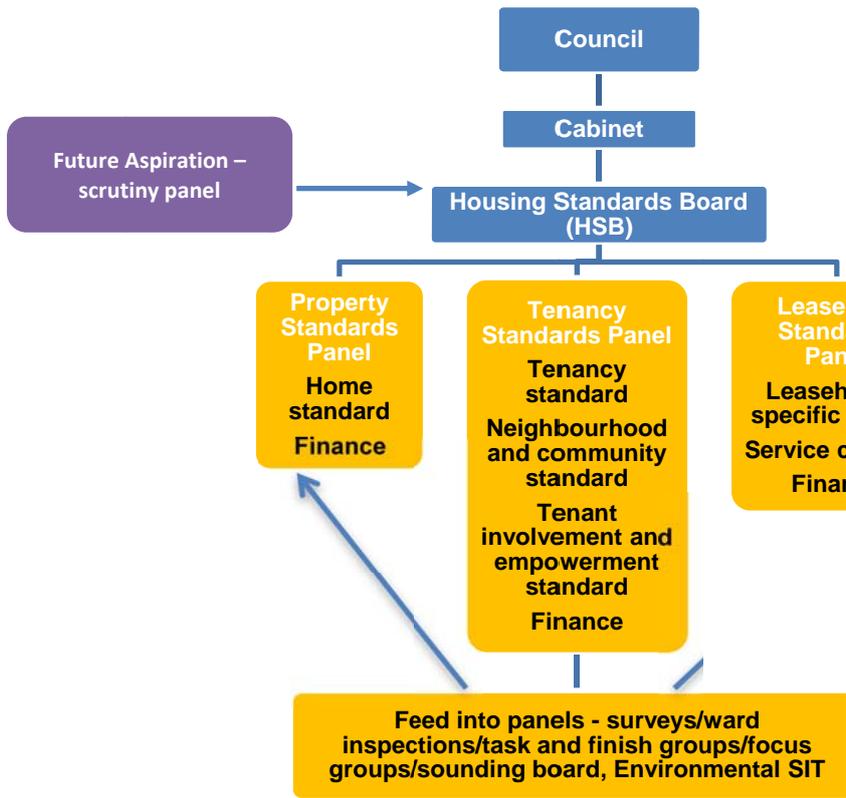
Tenant and leaseholder involvement is delivered through the Housing Service within the Council. The service has a dedicated budget and currently has one full time staff member (Community Engagement Co-ordinator) providing support to all the tenant and leaseholder panels and the HSB.

### ***Harlow Tenant and Leaseholder involvement and Empowerment Structures***

The structure introduced following our recent review provides a staged approach to delivering involvement (both passive and active) activity to our tenants and leaseholders. The structure provides an opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to choose the level of involvement they want at a level they feel best suits their needs.

A revised framework for the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Service has been agreed following the recent review. The revised structures are to be developed in two stages, with the stage one framework now in place. The frameworks for stage one and two are shown as:

Stage one:



Stage two:

