



Tenant Engagement and Influencing Strategy

| Document Control | |
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| Document Title | Tenant Engagement and Influencing Strategy |
| Author | Customer Service and Tenant Engagement Team Leader |
| Version | 1 |
| Release Date | August 2024 |
| Next Review Date | August 2027 |
| Document Type | Strategy |
| Approved By | Board |

Introduction

We have an ambitious new three-year Corporate Plan which builds on the strength of our previous plan and the many lessons learned. Our refreshed approach to tenant engagement and influence will help meet the needs and aspirations of our tenants and the communities as we work closely together. We will look to make the most of our geography and, through closer collaboration with partners and stakeholders, we will be able to support and connect tenants to the services they need.

This strategy firmly places our tenants at the very heart of all we do and recognises that their collaboration in co-creating, scrutinising and improving our services is essential as we continue to improve what we do and offer value for money.

At EPIC Housing we understand the benefits that can be realised from effective two-way conversations and collaboration with our tenants, using feedback and influence to shape our service priorities and measure the impact that our services have. This will ensure that we are delivering services in the right way, at the right time.

Engagement and influence will take many forms and will be tailored to the needs of our tenants, ensuring that every tenant has an effective method of getting in touch and providing feedback whatever their circumstances. We will meet the diverse needs of all tenants and ensure that we embed a culture of listening and responding to proactively meet their needs and priorities in everything that we do.

External Environment

As a social landlord the environment in which we operate has changed rapidly in recent years with changes in regulatory and best practice requirements and expectations on how we engage with tenants and communities to implement tenant feedback and involving tenants in the design and development of services.

The past few years have seen some of the most significant events in social housing, with the Grenfell fire tragedy in 2017, bringing conversations around the adequacy of social housing and especially the lack of tenant involvement and empowerment. Subsequently, the Government published the Social Housing Green Paper – “A New Deal for Social Housing” in 2018, with the aim of improving how social housing is regulated. More recent issues such as Awaab Ishak’s death and the Housing Ombudsman’s regular findings of severe maladministration have kept this conversation at the fore.

This all set the context for The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, which received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023. This is the most important piece of legislation in the social housing sector for years. The Act has three core objectives:

- To facilitate a new, proactive consumer regulation regime;
- To refine the existing economic regulatory regime; and
- To strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing’s (RSH) powers to enforce the consumer and economic regimes.

The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

The Act sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect from their landlord: -

1. To be safe in your home,
2. To know how your landlord is performing,
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,
4. To be treated with respect,
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord,
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in,
7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership.

A key component of The Regulator of Social Housing's 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard' states:

"Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- a. the formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities.*
- b. the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards.*
- c. the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved.*
- d. the management of their homes, where applicable.*
- e. the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made; and*
- f. agreeing local offers for service delivery."*

We will be adopting the National Housing Federation's 'Together with Tenants' Charter, to commit to a series of principles to embed a culture of continuous improvement in the ways we engage with tenants and communities in the development of our services.

The Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy has been developed to ensure that we have a variety of activities and methods of engagement so that all EPIC Housing tenants can provide feedback and influence service delivery in a way that suits them, their lifestyle and obligations, irrespective of their personal circumstances.

It will enable all tenants to engage in a collaborative effort to tell us what is important to them, their families and homes, and the communities in which they live and work. It will also enable ways in which tenants can be involved to help to shape service delivery.

This strategy will provide a robust framework for gathering feedback, listening to our tenants and acting upon what they tell us, and reporting back the impacts and effects of the feedback that they have provided (Tenant Insight). We will show our tenants that their voice is truly appreciated, taken on board, and influences the decisions that we make across the organisation and that we are committed to providing the best possible services and outcomes to meet their needs.

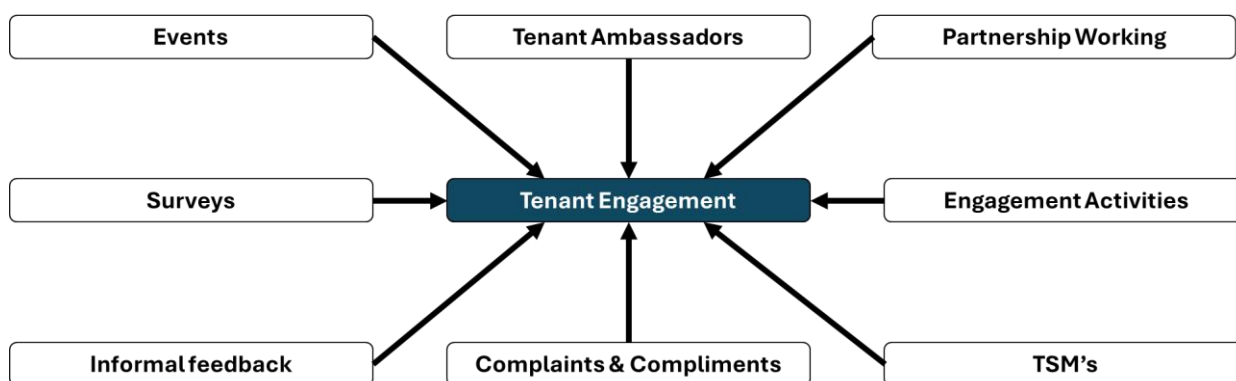
The activities described in this strategy are not exhaustive and while we will structure our future engagement plans around these activities, we may from time to time explore different ways of engaging with our tenants. This may be due to requirements around the subject matter being explored, opportunities arising from engagement with partners, lessons learned and listening to tenants on alternative approaches.

Tenant Insight & Engagement

Tenant insight looks at how we use tenants' voice and feedback to shape EPIC services and processes, to best suit tenants' needs. Because we plan to put more emphasis on tenant insight, we will make sure we are tackling the issues and concerns that matter to tenants the most. Using a more structured approach to tenant insight will enable us to:

- **Tenant Insight:** using the tenant voice and insight data we have to review services and deliver change
- **Tenant Voice:** by creating the right mechanisms to enable tenants to feedback on our services, hold us to account and suggest improvements,
- **Accessibility:** understanding our tenants and their needs, and ensuring services are designed to meet these

We will follow a continual, systematic style of engagement that will ensure constant learning is taken into account when delivering engagement activities. This will ensure that any activities we deliver are placed to gain maximum input from tenants, and that the insights gained are relevant, meaningful, and able to be used properly to help us prioritise the work that we do. We recognise that through day-to-day, business-as-usual activities we are continually engaging with tenants. This could be through surveys, receiving complaints and compliments, an applicant on our waiting list, a new tenant, or dealing with anti-social behaviour, as examples.



We recognise that tenants have different circumstances that will affect how they are able to engage with us and that as a result, formal engagement may not be suitable for everyone. We have developed a structure that offers a range of methods to provide as much variety as possible so that tenants have a variety of opportunities to engage.

We also recognise that not all tenants wish to engage in formal activities and therefore we also encourage feedback through other channels, such as complaints and compliments, general enquiries and conversations (e.g., during annual tenant check-ins) and comments made in surveys such as our TSM/STAR survey.

All of these different methods, both formal and informal, come together to give us an overall view of how tenants feel about the services that we provide, and all are taken into account when planning future service delivery.

Tenant Ambassadors:

Tenant Ambassadors form EPIC Housing's overarching consultation methods. The role of Tenant Ambassadors will evolve further to enable members to provide guidance on what activities we can offer to our tenants, learning from best practices and other providers to ensure that the activities that we offer are relevant, accessible, and varied to ensure that every tenant can have their voice heard.

We recognise the knowledge and skills Tenant Ambassadors bring to EPIC, their knowledge of the local area, and what's important to tenants is of real importance to us. Continuous improvement, training and development are important to us at EPIC, and we want to ensure that EPIC's Ambassadors have opportunities to learn and develop their skills, we will achieve this by:

- Encouraging ambassadors to attend formal and informal training arranged within the sector
- Training available with TPAS (Tenant Participation and Advisory Service)
- Shadowing and spending time with tenant representatives from other organisations

The role of a Tenant Ambassador will include:

- Performance monitoring across tenant-facing services.
- Input into EPIC Housing's publications, including the Tenants Annual Report, newsletters and communications around engagement opportunities.
- Help in planning for events, both EPIC-delivered and those in the wider community as a whole.
- Monitoring changes made to services as a result of tenant engagement, and the impact resulting from those changes.
- Reviewing engagement activities on offer, to ensure that they are robust, relevant, and offer sufficient variety.
- Training and support to enable all members to actively participate in the role.
- Scrutiny of EPIC processes and procedures.

Tenant Ambassadors will meet regularly and have access to all necessary information and data to support them. Ambassadors will also be invited to participate in wider conferences and events, both in person and virtual, develop greater insight into the role of the tenant ambassador/tenant representative whilst developing their knowledge on the emerging housing landscape and regulatory standards.

As Tenant Ambassadors will agree on the delivery of this strategy and all engagement activities, they will be able to take part in other methods of engagement. They will also be provided with feedback and results of all other engagement activities so that they can form an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation process and help us to identify learning, potential improvements and/or further engagement opportunities for the future.

Example Engagement Activities:

(1) Armchair Engagement

Armchair Engagement is available to all tenants and is an activity that can be undertaken at home.

Armchair Engagement will vary depending on the desired outcomes of each individual piece of work, but will include:

- Reviewing and providing feedback on items published by EPIC Housing, such as strategies, policies, working documents and the Tenant’s Annual Report.
- Deeper consultation on certain surveys, which will require more time and input than regular surveys.
- Providing comments on performance or future plans.
- Identifying opportunities to improve services based on research of other providers.

Armchair Engagement will offer those unable to take part at in-person meetings the chance to provide valuable feedback on the work that we undertake and ensure that we can gain a deeper insight into the needs and priorities of our tenants by offering the opportunity to take part in a way that suits their lifestyle and availability. It also enables tenants to take their time, access materials at their own pace, and have time to assess their responses to ensure they have conveyed their own thoughts and ideas.

Those who take part will be able to ask any questions regarding the topic and request any additional relevant information that may enable them to reach their own conclusions on any given subject. Following any Armchair Engagement activity, participants will be provided with feedback on what has been achieved as a result of their input; further information will be provided to the wider tenant population to show the benefits of engagement and to further promote recruitment to activities.

(2) Community Voice

These are held once a quarter and split across Bentilee and Meir. They provide an opportunity:

- For EPIC to share what’s happening across the business and any proposed changes that will affect service delivery;
- For tenants to influence and shape services;
- For tenants to share what’s going on in the wider community that would help to shape and drive changes to services and support to tenants;
- For tenants to shape content for next quarterly event;
- To hear from partner/voluntary organisations that work alongside EPIC and the wider community;
- To have a face-to-face interaction between tenants, EPIC staff, CEO and Board Member(s);
- To relay outputs and outcomes back to the full Board, via a Tenant Ambassador and/or through a Board Member present at each quarterly event; and
- For EPIC to share the various ways in which tenants can get involved to help shape and influence service and decision-making;

The quarterly Community Voice is open to all tenants to be involved. Meetings are scheduled both at evenings and weekends to provide for maximum opportunity for tenants to attend. Meetings will usually last for no longer than 2 hours but can be shorter or longer dependent on the subject matter. Attendees will be provided with information before the meeting which explains what will be covered, Any changes or impact as a result of tenant engagement via this method will be shared with all participants and advertised to the wider tenant population to encourage further engagement and participation in future.

(3) Estate Walkabouts

Estate Walkabouts will be planned in advance and will give tenants the opportunity to join EPIC Housing officers and staff on street and communal area inspections.

Each issue listed on an Estate Walkabout will be recorded on a monitor log and reported once the Estate Walkabout is concluded; the monitor log will then be updated as and when responses to the issues are fed back. These will be shared with the estate walkabout attendees (omitting any data protected by GDPR) so that tenants can see and take part in the work that is carried out in their properties and communities.

Tenant attendees will be given the chance to take part in estate walks that cover a different area/street than their own so that they can gain a wider insight into the condition of all of our stock, as this will help them to build a balanced view of our services and the demands upon these.

We will keep records of all issues raised on estate walkabouts so that we can monitor trends, to ensure that future walkabouts are properly staffed and to show the improvements that have been made to services because of estate walkabouts.

(4) Surveys

From time to time, we will send surveys to our tenants to ask for feedback on an issue. Surveys may be sent to a specific set of tenants (based on e.g., use of a service, geographical location, demographic, or previous contact) or the wider tenant population as a whole.

Surveys can cover a range of issues, including (but not limited to):

- Consultation on a policy review or similar.
- Recent experience of a particular service.
- Future plans of EPIC Housing.
- Changes in legislation and what we can do to mitigate any detrimental effects from these.

The content, nature and format of surveys may change depending on the subject matter; however, in each instance, tenants will be given contact details of relevant officers with EPIC Housing in case of any questions.

(5) Events

EPIC Housing will deliver a variety of events to help promote engagement, drive improvements, and enable our tenants to be kept informed of our performance and any opportunities that we may have to impact positively upon their lives, families and communities. These events will range in size, location, and purpose, depending on the nature of the event and its intended outcomes.

Events will enable tenants to engage with staff in a more informal setting and to gain further advice and support from any partner agencies that are in attendance.

Where possible, we will include our tenants in planning and promoting events to ensure that we make them as relevant as possible to the intended audience.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures – Tenant Perception Results (STAR survey)

The Regulator of Social Housing sets standards that all social housing landlords must meet. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires that all registered providers of social housing collect and report annually their performance using a core set of defined measures. Tenant Satisfaction measures (TSMs) help show how well landlords are doing at providing good quality homes and services.

EPIC will carry out a perception survey each year and information on how our tenants think we are performing will be shared in a variety of different methods, including (but not limited to):

- Tenants Annual Report
- Tenants Newsletter
- Information provided at events
- Engagement activities that are identified as a result of feedback from the STAR survey
- Online and via social media

The STAR survey is one mechanism that periodically we will use to gather Equality and Diversity Information about our tenants, which we can then use to identify gaps in our engagement with certain demographics and ensure that our planned activities meet the needs of our tenants and are open and inclusive to all. Equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of everything we do. We aim to create an exceptional environment where everyone feels included and can be themselves.

We want to do more than just pay lip service to increasing the diversity. Inclusion and diversity is a fundamental part of our values and our culture. We value difference and the contributions of all, we embrace diversity, knowing it makes us stronger and more successful and we aim to embed inclusion into our everyday ways of working.

We'll continue our focus on inclusion to ensure we're best represented by the communities we serve. We'll provide opportunities for all residents to develop and thrive.

In addition, information from the STAR survey will be used to identify and engage with tenants, recruit tenants to our current and future involvement activities, and identify potential key themes for future subjects for scrutiny, based on the overall feedback from tenants and what they have identified as being important to them.

Changes or decisions made as a result of surveys will be conveyed to the wider tenant population, and a more in-depth breakdown of results will be provided to all survey participants. Changes will also be included on the EPIC Housing Change Log to detail what improvements have been made and what impacts have been identified as a result of any changes.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We are committed to ensuring and promoting equality of opportunity for all. We are opposed to unfair discrimination on any grounds, including race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age, or any unjustifiable criteria. In accordance with this commitment, we will provide a range of opportunities for involvement, and make information available in a variety of formats, to ensure accessibility to all residents.

Sat alongside this Strategy is an Equality Impact Assessment.

Governance

The voice of the tenant should be heard at all levels in a transparent and meaningful way, from Board through to day-to-day conversations. Through our governance structure, we will ensure that the voice of the tenant is heard at each Board meeting, through regular reporting and direct feedback from a Tenant Ambassador.

Change Log

EPIC Housing keeps a log of any changes made to services delivered by us and the impact that this has had on our tenants. This is known as the EPIC Housing Change Log, and it includes changes made as a result of tenant influence via:

- All formal tenant engagement activities.
- Complaints and compliments.
- Events.
- Any activities that have included feedback from tenants, voluntary groups, statutory agencies or other partners.

These changes will be shared with our wider tenant body through appropriate channels; direct feedback will be shared with anyone who has provided direct feedback that has resulted in the change. Further information will be shared via the Tenants Annual Report and newsletters.

Further information and delivery

As part of our commitment to providing excellent services, each engagement activity will include a short review to ensure that it has met its objectives, record all outcomes and results, and to learn from each activity so that future instances can be improved upon. We will also be able to use this review cycle to identify new activities going forward, as well as training and partnership opportunities that will benefit either our tenants, EPIC Housing, or both.

EPIC Housing keeps a log of all changes and impacts that have been achieved through engaging with tenants, in both formal ways (as laid out in this strategy) and informal methods, such as participating in events, receiving complaints and compliments, and general conversations with tenants and their families. All changes and impacts as result of formal engagement methods will be recorded in the log so that we can quickly evidence the input that our tenants have had and the impacts of this upon the services that we provide.

Responsibility for delivering the strategy

The Director of Housing and the Chief Executive Officer will have overall responsibility for the operational implementation of this strategy, and to ensure that tenant engagement is embedded in day-to-day working practices throughout the organisation.

It is the role of the Customer Services and Tenant Engagement Team Leader to implement, monitor, and review all engagement methods (both formal and informal) used at EPIC Housing; and to record all outcomes and impacts that result from these activities.

However, all staff at EPIC Housing will be responsible for taking part in activities, identifying opportunities to gather feedback on issues, and implementing any changes or suggestions that arise from engagement activities within their department. This includes Board members and the executive team where appropriate, to ensure that tenants' voices are heard at all levels throughout the organisation, and that our tenants are listened to and respected in line with this strategy and other documents that impact upon the services that our tenants receive.

VERSION CONTROL

| Date of Review | Reviewer | Version Number | Date of next review | Approved by |
|----------------|--|----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| August 2024 | Customer Service and Tenant Engagement Team Leader | 1 | August 2027 | Board |
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