

Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement 2021/24

Improving the customer experience



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Revision sheet

Revision number	Last review date	Planned review date	Key changes	Comments
1	12 March	October 2024	Deleted information on Tenants Tell Us Panel and Mystery shopping as it does not exist any longer	
2	13 March		Added Revision sheet and responsibilities table	
3	18 April		Deleted information on MADD day	

Introduction

We believe in providing quality services that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

Our Vision

We want to work closely with our customers to ensure that by working together, we provide the best possible service to them.

Our Aims

1. We want to give our customers the encouragement and opportunity to really make a difference to their homes and communities
2. We will ensure we will give our customers the opportunity to challenge, scrutinise, shape and improve the services that we provide
3. We will support our customers in providing them with the skills and information to improve their communities and the Housing Service we provide. We believe that this support will also benefit our customers, by assisting their own volunteering, training and employment goals

Our thanks

We greatly value the time and effort that residents put into becoming involved and making a difference. Thank you.

Our commitment to tenant and leaseholder engagement

Southampton City Council is committed to offering and supporting opportunities for customers to get involved. We have:

1. A dedicated engagement team, which makes sure we will act on our commitment and with other Housing staff:
 - Offer a wide range of options which enable customers to get involved as much as they want to, and in ways that suit them
 - Empower tenants and leaseholders to make a difference to the services they receive, and in their local communities
 - Spread good news stories about successful engagement, which in turn will encourage others to get involved

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- Offer tenants and leaseholders genuine opportunities to scrutinise and challenge our performance
 - Evaluate the impact of involvement both to the housing service and to its customers, in terms of value for money and other benefits
2. A dedicated annual budget for engagement, spent on the following and agreed with customers:
 - We offer financial assistance to Tenant and Residents' Associations to cover their day to day running expenses
 - Assistance with travel costs for customers to attend meetings, conferences and training; and childcare allowances to enable attendance at involvement activities
 - We run a wide range of training courses for customers
 - Run conferences and other events to consult and inform customers
 - Help with publicity for your groups and events through posters and leaflets etc.
 3. A staff wide commitment to engaging tenants and leaseholders which means we will ensure:
 - that tenant and leaseholder engagement is seen as part of everyone's job
 - staff are regularly updated on engagement successes; and staff are given support and resources for time required to undertake customer engagement activities
 4. We will also be able to provide information on where to find free computer access.
 5. A Code of Conduct which ensures that all engagement activities take place in a courteous and respectful environment.

Our Customer Engagement commitments for 2018/20 can be found here:

https://www.southampton.gov.uk/images/customer-engagement_tcm63-402668.pdf

While this document refers mainly to tenants and leaseholders as its customers, it also applies to people who may become our customers or may be involved with the service at different times and under different circumstances. For example - owner occupiers and private tenants living on estates where improvement programmes are taking place, applicants on the Housing waiting list and well as customers of other services such as our Community Alarm Service.

Improving Services

We support a wide range of tenant groups to ensure that housing has a strong customer focus and our customers are able to shape the service they receive.

Tenant Scrutiny Panel

This Panel looks closely at the performance of the Housing Service. It has access to the performance information for each department and is able to identify areas of good performance as well as analysing and identifying areas for improvement. It can ask both the Tenant Inspectors and Tenant Mystery Shoppers to provide an independent overview of the service and where necessary make recommendations for improvement.

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel have looked at a number of issues including the Grounds Maintenance service and made recommendations for change.

Tenant Resources Group

This is a group of tenants who work with us to influence our spending plans and ensure the Council's capital and revenue expenditure reflect tenant priorities. We regularly involve this group in our spending and maintenance issues so that they can genuinely influence the long term planning issues related to the housing stock.

Tenant Repairs Panel

This tenants' group works closely with the Housing Operations Team to help us improve our Responsive Repairs Service.

The Panel has been instrumental in helping design an online repairs reporting form and helped design a home decorating pack for new tenants.



Tenants' Building Safety Group

We are committed to ensuring that our residents are safe and that they feel safe in their homes. Building safety is a top priority for us and this group gives our tenants a voice on building safety: the group looks at ways of improving how tenants can communicate concerns over fire and building safety issues, discusses fire safety initiatives across housing to ensure residents are better informed about the safety of their buildings and have a greater say in work carried out.

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Tenant Inspectors

Our Tenant Inspectors work hard to look in depth at service areas decided by tenants. The Inspectors assess our performance, comment on policies and procedures, and make recommendations for improvement. Inspectors will interview staff and tenants, carry out surveys and mystery shopping to enable them to get a well –rounded picture of the service they are looking at.

After each of the inspections we discuss the Inspectors' recommendations with the relevant service manager and in each case we have altered our policy, procedure, and approach, to take these on board. This is a real success story and a vital mechanism for tenants to have a genuine influence on the services they receive.

Some of the issues the Tenant Inspectors have looked at are; the quality of our Anti-Social Behaviour service, estate walkabouts, and Decent Neighbourhoods scheme, etc.

The Leaseholder Forum

This forum is a chance for leaseholders across the city and the council to work together to improve the service for all. The forum acts as a sounding board about changes to the service and suggests where improvements can be made.

The aim of the Forum is to ensure that Leaseholders have a voice and are able to work closely with the council.

Supported Housing Forum

This well attended and popular forum is for residents living in our supported housing. This consultative forum often discuss issues around the services they receive as well as wider issues that affect tenants across the city.



Green space monitors

Green space monitors are volunteer tenants who take an interest in the green and open spaces surrounding their homes. They each complete a short survey once a month to let us know where we are providing a good service and where we need to improve. This information is regularly fed back to our open spaces team who use it to ensure you receive the best possible service.

Cleaning monitors

We now have a growing number of tenants monitoring the cleaning standard for Tower Blocks and Walk-up Blocks across the city. The monitors inspect the cleaning of communal areas each week or month to help rate the cleaning service and report any problems to the Senior

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Neighbourhood Warden so that they can be quickly resolved

Focus Groups

There are often opportunities for tenants to attend focus group meetings. These tend to be 'one-off' meetings lasting 2-3 hours looking at a specific subject. We have run Focus groups looking at such things as our Repairs service, Tenants' Link, Better Care, etc.

Service standards

<https://www.southampton.gov.uk/housing/your-tenancy/service-standards/>

We have produced a range of service standards which advise customers on the level of service they can expect from each service area. These service standards are available on the Council's website.

We will continue to involve customers in defining the level of service they want. We will also agree with customers how we will monitor and report on our progress and how we will review the standards on an ongoing basis.

Handling Complaints

We aim to provide high quality services, and are delighted to hear from our customers when they feel we have done a good job. However we also want them to tell us if they think we have let them down so that we can put things right and improve our service for the future. These principles are contained in our compliments, comments and complaints policy. We are committed to learning from complaints and using feedback to improve our services. We will develop ways of informing residents how their views have made a difference.

We have a Tenants Complaints Panel (part of Scrutiny Panel) which gives a complainant the opportunity to have the outcome of their complaint reviewed by other tenants as part of the formal stage 2 complaints process. This provides a customer perspective on how the council addresses complaints and the Tenants Complaints Panel can recommend where we need to improve services or change policies.

Identifying how tenant engagement has made a difference to the service

We believe that resident engagement improves services and communities and ensures that money is spent on things that are important to customers.

We talk to tenants about our service on a daily basis. We are conscious that many residents volunteer a lot of their free time to help us improve our service. As a consequence we are committed to demonstrating how involvement has changed and improved the service, and hope that this will encourage even more tenants to get involved and make a difference.

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Using various methods such as Newsletters, websites, events and through tenant reps, we will look to share news of successes. We will also highlight areas we know we can improve and where we think we can achieve better value for money.

Knowing our customers and offering personal choice

Knowing our customers and better household profiling

We are trying to have a better understanding of our customers and their preferences, so we can ensure we offer choices that will be relevant to them.

Diversity

No individual or group should face barriers to becoming involved or be discriminated against. We recognise and respect, though, that some residents will choose not to get involved.

We know that some groups are under-represented and we will continue to look for new and appropriate ways of encouraging their engagement.

The diversity calendar

The diversity calendar is produced by our Stronger Community Engagement Team, by our Tenant Engagement Officers. The calendar has information on national, international, UN, faith and fun days and it might help you decide when to hold an event.

[View the diversity calendar.](#)

Providing customer choice

We know that our customers like choice, because it makes the service feel that bit more personal. We currently offer choice in a number of areas:

We offer choices of colours and finishes when we install kitchens and bathrooms. We offer a few different ways to pay rent, and provide a range of options on how we can be contacted for example by face to face, letter, phone, text, email, twitter or Facebook. We offer choice through the Homebid and mutual exchange systems and the option for residents to buy their home.

However there will be some areas where we can't offer choices and we will be honest and clear about this. However we are keen to find out where tenants and leaseholders would like greater choice, and improving the range of choices we offer.

Community

Opportunities for improving the area where you live

Decent Neighbourhoods Projects

We are continuing to improve the open spaces in and around our estates through a scheme called Decent Neighbourhoods.

The priorities for the Decent Neighbourhoods agenda are:

- Create neighbourhoods people are happy to live in
- Deliver a programme of projects to improve the appearance of our estates
- Develop, nurture and sustain a sense of pride and local identity through resident engagement

We are continually looking to improve our Neighbourhoods by working with our residents on ideas, designs and materials to create communities and areas that they feel proud of.

We believe that involving residents in a process that improves and changes their Neighbourhoods through physical improvements can have a huge impact on the quality of life for residents. This can also lead to higher levels of resident involvement across a whole community.

We will encourage customers working on Decent Neighbourhoods projects in different areas of the city to share their ideas and experiences so that we can learn from them as schemes move across the city.

Estate Regeneration

We will involve tenants and leaseholders in our estate regeneration schemes, ensuring that we get the right design and facilities for the community.

Estate Improvement Programme

We will set aside a budget specifically to tackle smaller issues raised by tenants and leaseholders in their areas. In this way tenants and leaseholders are able to have an effect on the appearance of the area, getting rid of small scale 'eye sores' and brightening up the neighbourhoods.

Please contact your Local Housing Office for more information.

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Estate Inspections and walkabouts

Residents can accompany housing and other staff around their estate, identifying problems and monitoring the service. We will also support customers to carry out their own inspections, and will try and act on problems that need following up.

We will publish details in advance, and aim to feed back on the outcomes of inspections in a way that suits the tenants in that area. Estate Inspections and walkabouts are an important tool in ensuring estates are well maintained and identifying improvements tenants and leaseholders want to see.

From time to time we introduce new initiatives which any resident can participate in.

Opportunities for young people to get involved - Junior Wardens

We recognise that young people are our customers too and some will become our tenants of the future. We want to make sure that young people are fully engaged in improving our neighbourhoods and services.

The scheme is designed to encourage children aged 7-12 to engage in community activities, projects and events across Southampton.

We will support them to develop a sense of pride and respect in their local neighbourhood and promote a positive image of children in the community.

Our juniors work alongside the council's Neighbourhood Wardens and other council services to help improve their local area.



Volunteering in Supported Housing

We are grateful to our volunteers and are always looking for new volunteers. If this appeals to you, we are able to offer a range of volunteering opportunities, helping, supporting and enriching the lives of our supported housing residents. We have found that volunteering can change lives and provides sense of achievement and worth. We offer volunteering opportunities for all ages.

Bringing in extra money - grant aid to community groups

We support residents' groups and individuals to apply for grants that are available for community activities and projects. Applying for grants can be complicated and time consuming but we have staff, tenants and leaseholders who can provide a helping hand. Plus, look out for our Grant Training sessions.

Working with others

Community groups

We recognise the importance and benefits of Resident groups, gardening clubs and social groups etc. as they play a key role in bringing the community together.

It is clear when residents work together, there is an increased sense of community spirit and areas improve.

Tenants and Residents Associations

We will continue to play an active role in setting up and supporting Tenants' and Residents' Associations and encouraging them to represent the views of their communities and make a difference in their areas.

Block Representatives

Block & Street Representatives (Reps) represent the views of residents in a small defined area. We encourage them to be a link between the Council and local tenants and leaseholders, so that we can hear and respond to local views. Block Reps play a key role in helping to develop community spirit in their areas, sometimes arranging residents' get-togethers and social occasions. They also help to make sure the area is well maintained by attending walkabouts and reporting communal repairs.

City Wide Block Rep Forum: The city wide block rep forum is a chance for block reps across the city and the council to work together to improve the service for all. The forum enable block reps to obtain information about what is going on in council housing services, the city council and other organisations; be a forum for block reps to communicate the views of the residents they represent to the city council and other organisations; to act as consultative body when new or updated policies, procedures or working practices are proposed and be a place where block reps can share their experiences and spread good practice, especially about their role and how they can make a difference in their area.

The forum is open to all officially elected block and street reps and those going through the process of becoming block or street reps.

Activities for older people

We have Activity Coordinators who work across Supported Housing schemes in the city to help set up and support a wide range of activities to reduce social isolation and improve residents' health and well-being.

Training, Support and Communication

Training

We are really proud of the large number of free tenant training courses we run. Some of these courses will provide tenants with various skills and information to ensure they get the most out of being a volunteer.

Here are just some of the courses available:

- Improve your home with basic DIY skills
- Discovering how the council works
- Photo fun with Ipads
- Getting the most out of your mobile phone
- Getting started with internet banking

Our tenants find that the courses not only assist them with involvement in the housing service and in their community but help in other areas of their lives. In line with our aims of helping people into work and career development, we are particularly keen to help our customers design and use the training available as a route into further training or employment.

When tenants have attended training, we encourage them to share their feedback with others which can also help develop confidence and presentation skills.

Training courses range from 2 hours to a day and a few courses run over a number of weeks.

Some of our tenants and leaseholders who have attended training courses have reported the following:

Following the training I have become a first aid rep at charity shop which I volunteer at.

As the treasurer I am now able to keep track of the finances of the group following the Treasury training skills.

I have used my Public Speaking skills in a conference for Social Services. Following the training I have more confidence and I now volunteer at a school.

The training helped me set up community garden group and I am now the secretary. We have applied for funding for the group following the grant training course.

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T.E.E.M. (Training, Education, Employment, Motivation)

The Employment Support Team is the council's employment support service that offers help, advice and support to people who are disabled or disadvantaged, to find work or training.



T.E.E.M provides work clubs for Southampton Council Housing tenants, and additional one-to-one support if required. They are free to attend and provide help with CVs, job search, completing application forms, interview practice and other help to find a job in a friendly community environment.

Links to other Housing providers

We work closely with other local Housing Providers to provide joint training events (South Coast Training). This gives our tenants the opportunities to meet other tenants from around Hampshire and share ideas.



In May 2019 South Coast Training celebrated its 20th anniversary.

We organise visits to other housing organisations to share good practice.

In addition to running local training events we also enable residents to attend nationwide conferences, seminars and workshops.

Support

Financial support

We ensure that no tenant is 'out of pocket' when attending events run by Housing Services. See page four.

Support for groups and individuals

The Tenant Engagement Team are always on hand to help tenants get the most out of becoming involved in the housing service and their communities.

Obtaining external funding

We have a successful track record of encouraging individuals and groups to find and apply for external funding opportunities. This may be, for example, for communal area improvements, social activities and community development. The Tenant Engagement team will support groups

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to make applications. We are also on hand to help put project plans in place and see them through.

Dispute resolution

The Tenant Engagement Officer can assist with disputes within a residents' group or can bring in independent mediators such as New Forest Mediation or Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) if necessary.

The Council has also formally adopted a code of conduct which applies to all involvement activities and aims to ensure all tenants and leaseholders have an equal and fair opportunity to be involved. This can be found on the Council's website or a copy can be provided by the Tenants Engagement Team.

Standard documents

The Tenant Engagement Team provides documents useful for setting up and running a Tenants Group.

External support

There are local and national support organisations available to our involved residents.



Southampton Voluntary Services will help with grant applications. TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) or TAROE Trust (Tenants and Residents Organisations of England) can be contacted for their advice and expertise on resident involvement.

The 'useful contacts' section on page 19 has contact details of a number of organisations from across the country.

Communication

Website

The Tenant Engagement Team has its own pages on the Southampton City Council website at www.southampton.gov.uk/tpu containing lots of information on the team, the activities supported, and the ways of getting involved.



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Tenants' Link



Tenants' Link is Southampton City Council's monthly online magazine:

<https://www.southampton.gov.uk/tenantslink>

The magazine provides the latest news and advise on what is happening in housing in Southampton.

Facebook® & Twitter®

Because we constantly seek to improve levels of involvement, and to offer tenants and leaseholders opportunities to be involved in a way that suits them, we have a housing Facebook and Twitter page.



Our Facebook page can be found at [@southamptonhousing](https://www.facebook.com/southamptonhousing) and our twitter page is [@sotonhousing](https://twitter.com/sotonhousing).



The Tenants' Sounding Board - our list of interested and involved tenants

We have a list of over 350 tenants and leaseholders who have said that they would like to be involved one way or another, and constantly contact them for views and feedback, which then influence our decisions and services.

We will continue to encourage tenants from under-represented groups and areas to be involved. This includes tenants from areas where there are no tenants associations or Block/Street Reps, black and ethnic minority groups, young people and young families.

Making sure we give our customers the results and feedback from consultations

We are always grateful for customers completing our surveys. We know how important it is to ensure we feed back to our customers the results of any consultation or survey. Look out for our survey results in Tenants' Link, Newsletters and the council's website etc.

Winter & Summer Housing conferences

We run popular Winter & Summer Conferences. The Winter conference provides an

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opportunity to update attendees on housing news, performance, new policy initiatives and plans for the next year. The conference give tenants the opportunity to discuss, challenge and contribute to these debates, and to influence strategic and financial decisions, such as the direction and priorities for our capital spending. Our Summer conference provides an opportunity for our tenants' groups to update attendees on the work they have done in the last year, of their successes and plans for the next year.

The conference format is constantly evolving and has included a combination of guest speakers, presentations, group workshops, and information stands.



Annual report

We ensure that we involve customers in producing an Annual Report. The Annual Report shows customers how we are performing against our commitments and also outlines our plans to improve the service.

We will use the annual report to obtain feedback from our customers on our current services and to set future priorities.

Monitoring and reviewing how we are doing

How we monitor progress

We need residents' help to monitor how we are doing. Below are our actions which highlights our aims over the next 2 years. We will look at this regularly with residents to check on achievements. We are keen to make sure that the activities we undertake enable them to influence, change, and improve the service.

Action plan

- Ensure customers have genuine opportunities to scrutinise and challenge our performance
Illustrate how customer involvement has made a difference to the service
- Evaluate the impact of customer involvement in relation to value for money
- Spread good news stories about customer involvement
- Involve customers in policy reviews and introduction of new policies

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Appendix 1:

Useful contacts:

Tenant Engagement Team

Lower Ground Floor
West Wing
Civic Centre
Southampton City Council
Southampton
SO14 7LY
Tel: 023 8083 3185
Email: tenant.engagement@southampton.gov.uk
Web: www.southampton.gov.uk/tpu
Facebook: @southamptonhousing
Twitter: [@sotonhousing](https://twitter.com/sotonhousing)

Homes and Communities Agency

Windsor House
50 Victoria Street
Westminster
London
W1H 0TL
Tel: 0300 1234 500
Email: mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk

The Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
Tel: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983
Email: advice@lgo.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service

Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
Isle of Dogs
London
E14 9GE
Tel: 0300 111 3000
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Tenant Participatory Advisory Service

Tpas Ltd
7D Paragon House
48 Seymour Grove
Old Trafford
Manchester
M16 0LN
Tel: 0161 868 3500
Email: info@tpas.org.uk
Web: www.tpas.org.uk

Southampton Voluntary Services (SVS)

The Voluntary Action Centre
Kingsland Square
St Mary Street
Southampton
SO14 1NW
Tel: 023 8022 8291
Email: information@southamptonvs.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

3 Kings Park Road
Southampton
Hampshire
SO15 2AT
Tel: 023 8022 1406 or 023 8033 3868
Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

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Appendix 2:

Responsibilities and review of the procedure	
Author	Lepsa Stojkovic
Responsible Manager	Matthew Luik
Implementation date	2022
Review Date	October 2024

Appendices	
The list of contacts	Appendix 1
Table of responsibilities	Appendix 2