

# **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-011-2023/24

**Date of meeting:** 10 July 2023



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio:** Property & Housing (Cllr Holly Whitbread)

**Subject:** Housing Resident Involvement Strategy

**Responsible Officer:** Surjit Balu, Interim Director of Housing and Property  
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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

- (1) **Cabinet considers and endorses the Resident Involvement Strategy 2022/27**

## **Executive Summary:**

The Regulator of Social *Housing (RSH)* regulates registered providers of social housing to promote a viable, efficient, and well-governed social housing sector, which is able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. The regulatory framework for social housing in England is based on three economic standards and four consumer standards that all registered social housing providers must adhere to. This includes the **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (Consumer) Standard 2017**, which sets expectations for registered social housing providers to provide choice, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants, to have a clear approach to complaints, and to provide a wide range of opportunities for tenants to have influence and be involved.

Meaningful resident involvement is a key part of delivering sustainable communities and helping to improve the quality of life of our residents. As well as giving residents a voice to shape future decisions and improve services, on an individual level such involvement provides opportunity for people to make social connections and lasting friendships, reduce loneliness, boost confidence, and generate a sense of wellbeing. By working in partnership with residents we are stronger together and more able to achieve our vision to “create great places where people want to live”.

With the above context in mind, the EFDC Resident Involvement Strategy 2022/27 ([Appendix 1](#)) provides a new framework for resident involvement, which recognises that there is no ‘*one size fits all*’. It sets out a wide range of engagement opportunities for residents to ‘Get Involved’ as much or as little as they may wish, based on their interests, time available and preferred method of communication. It provides mechanisms to encourage resident scrutiny, particularly around decision making, finances and performance, thereby ensuring the Service remains accountable to its residents. The success of the strategy is linked to the development of a culture across the Council and our partners where, resident involvement is valued, embedded across core functions and, demonstrates the voice of our customers is heard.

Note. When preparing the Draft Resident Involvement Strategy and, at the specific request of both the Resident Involvement Co-Create Group and Tenant & Leaseholder Panel, Officers have developed a non-standard strategy template in favour of a shorter, more engaging, easy to read document.

## Reasons for Proposed Decision:

There is a requirement through key regulation as outlined above and this, along with EFDC's mission for the District to work together to serve our community, putting our customers at the heart of everything we do and focusing on the things that matter most to local people (EFDC Corporate Plan 2023 – 2027), demonstrates the reason for the proposed decision.

To further support the decision making, resident involvement runs throughout the 2020 **White Paper "The Charter for Social Housing Residents"**. Of particular relevance to the Draft Resident Involvement Strategy is Chapter Five, "*To have your voice heard by your landlord*", which requires landlords to ensure that residents are a key part of their governance and that consumer-led assurance arrangements are in place. This aligns with the approach being taken at EFDC.

The Charter covers seven key themes as follows:

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.

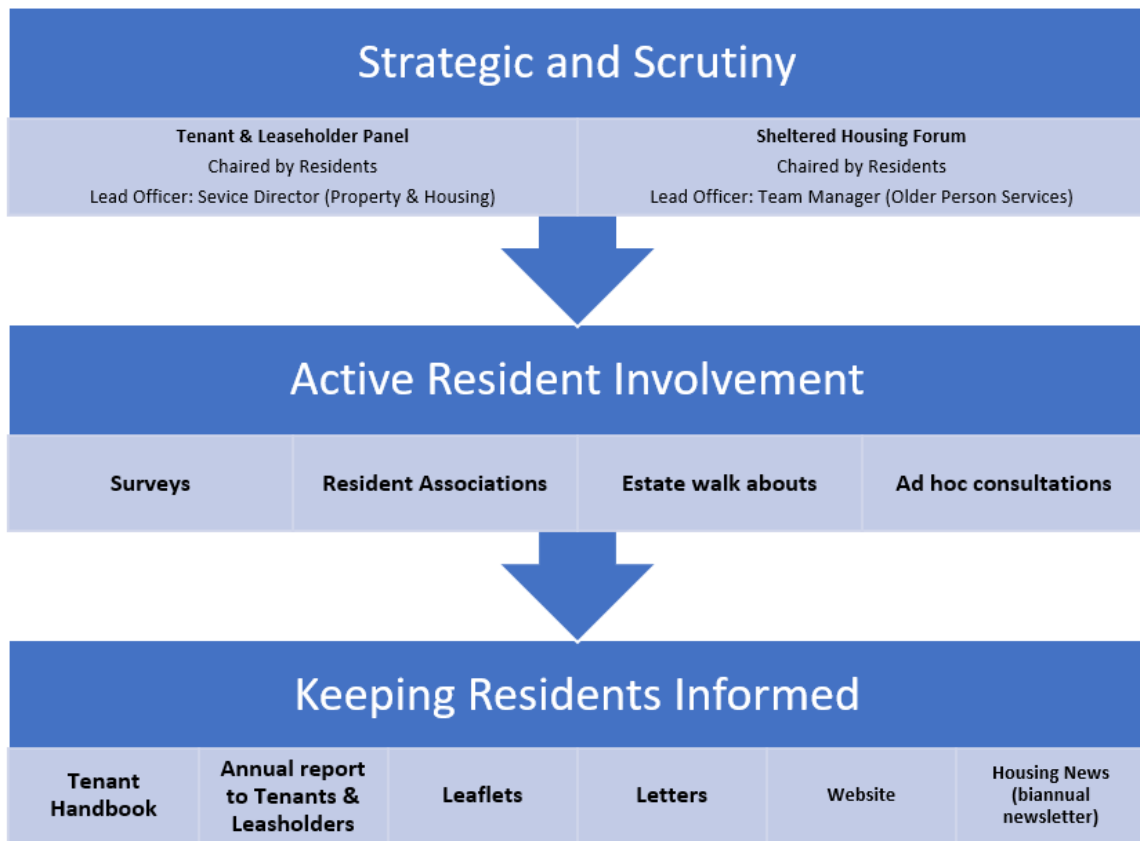
## Other Options for Action:

There are no other actions for consideration in this report.

## Report:

1. Historically, the Council's housing management service has been delivered by geographical teams, however more recently these services have been delivered through specialist workstreams, removing conflicting priorities and allowing staff to focus on critical functions such as resident involvement. Following the Council's restructure in 2019, the Resident Involvement function (Property & Housing Services) was transferred to the Tenancy & Estate Management team 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2023.
2. A Peer Review, commission by the Council in March 2019, undertaken by the East of England Local Government Association (LGA), found the Council's existing resident involvement framework to be limited and recommended that it be reviewed, and additional resources considered.
3. The **resident involvement framework under the existing 'Tenant Participation Strategy'**, is described in Figure 1. It was recognised that only a small number of our 6,500 tenants and 1,050 leaseholders are actively involved in formal / active resident involvement activities and the framework should be refreshed to provide a modern, inclusive, tailored suite of engagement opportunities to better meet the needs of our customers, the business and in order to satisfy our statutory obligations

Figure 1 – Existing Tenant Participation Framework



4. Under the existing approach, Tenants and Leaseholders views are represented by the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel, which formed in 2019 when the former Tenants' Panel and the Leaseholder Association amalgamated to become one group following waning attendance. Its role is to take an independent detailed look at how the Property & Housing Service is performing, and to carry out in-depth reviews of various aspects of the service. Residents of the District's sheltered housing schemes are represented by a Sheltered Housing Forum.
5. At a more local level, there are currently five active, recognised resident-led Associations operating within the District, namely: Limes Farm Community Group (Chigwell), Chapel Road Residents Association (Epping), Romeland Residents Association (Waltham Abbey), People of Roydon and Roundhills Residents Association (Waltham Abbey). Each group has a signed constitution which is approved by the Council, and which sets out its function, membership and how it will operate.
6. Tenants and Leaseholders are kept informed through the Council's website, housing information leaflets and publicity documents.
7. The Council undertakes independent tenant satisfaction survey (STAR survey) every three years. This will change in the current financial year to the undertaking of Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) which replace the STAR survey as part of the strengthened approach of the Regulator for Social Housing towards engaging customers. The Council are currently progressing a piece of work to ensure the obligations of the TSMs are met.
8. **Development of a new approach to Resident Involvement.** During the period October 2020 – September 2021, Officers worked with colleagues across the Service and with residents to understand what 'good' involvement looks like, to identify opportunities for involvement and to further our understanding of how EFDC residents prefer to be involved. Officers joined a best practice networking group and attended relevant conferences, taking time to understand best practice within the sector. Interested residents volunteered to join a

Resident Involvement Co-Creation group to help shape a new model of resident involvement which better meets the needs and wants of customers and the business, as well as fulfilling current and future regulatory requirements. Alongside this, a combination of digital and ‘in person’ involvement opportunities were piloted to help inform our future approach.

9. The draft Resident Involvement Strategy has been created collaboratively with the Resident Involvement Co-creation Group, who are a group of residents and staff, passionate about resident involvement, sharing a desire to continuously improve the way our residents are involved. The draft Resident Involvement Strategy has been endorsed by the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel.
10. To better understand the views of our customers, the Property & Housing Service undertook a customer satisfaction survey between January 2020 – April 2020 using the industry STAR methodology. Tenants were also asked how they wanted to be involved with the EFDC Housing Service. Whilst 82% said they did not want to be involved; a number of tenants did express an interest in being involved. A summary of this is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Summary responses of involvement method

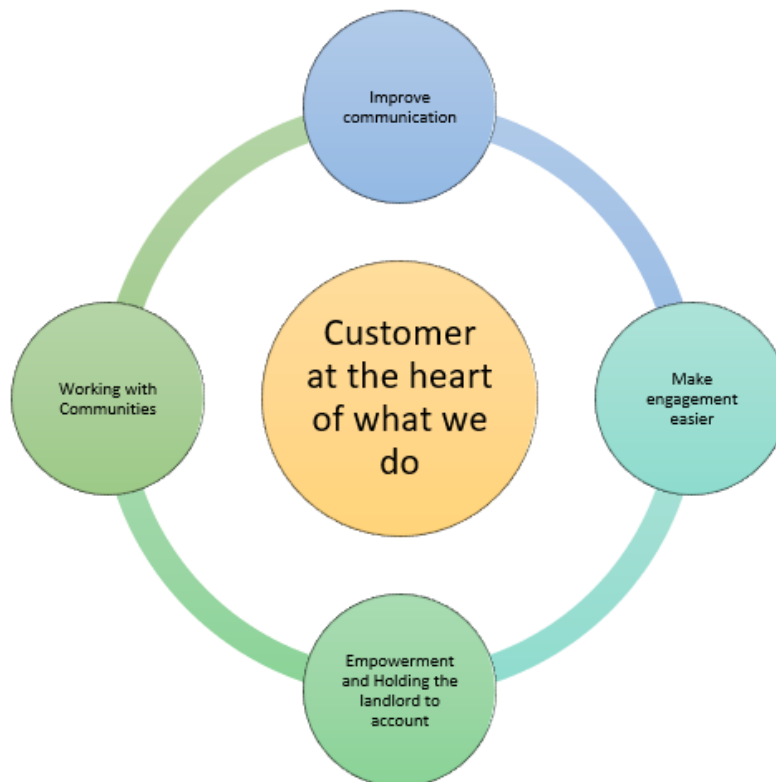
Method of Involvement	Number of respondents
Not interested in getting involved	82
Armchair reviewer	10
Mystery Shopper	9
Tenant & Leaseholder Panel	9
Tenant working party	7
Website	6
Social media	6
Other	5

11. The survey also found that half of the tenants surveyed used the internet on a daily, or almost daily basis (52%) with a further 11% using it weekly. Whilst some use it less frequently, in all, 72% of tenants use it at some time. However, there was a marked difference between the tenures. 74% of general needs tenants said they used the internet (54% daily), whilst just 47% of sheltered tenants use the internet (30% daily). When asked why tenants didn’t use the internet, 259 tenants gave an answer, and of those, 107 told us they did not want to use it. A similar number gave ‘other’ reasons such as old age, and 22 said they lacked the skills, but very few cited costs of equipment or connection as the reason.
12. Overall, insight from the Star Survey highlighted a need to rethink our approach to involvement to ensure that it is fit for the future and designed with residents and their voice at its heart.
13. **A New Strategy for Resident Involvement.** Our vision for the Service is to “Create Great Places Where People Want to Live”. To do this, we must listen to what our residents want. We asked our Co-Create Group of involved residents to tell us what good resident involvement looked like to them and adopted these principles in the development of the draft Strategy.
14. The Resident Involvement Co-creation Group agreed that effective resident engagement promotes a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants and their landlord. It exists when these interests work together towards a common goal of better

housing conditions and housing services. The group agreed seven key principles of what “good” resident involvement looks like to them.

15. The Co-Create Group and Tenant & Leaseholder Panel were clear that the draft RI strategy should be referred to as the Resident Involvement Strategy (Property & Housing Services), as it was felt that naming it the ‘Tenant and Leaseholder’ Involvement Strategy was less inclusive and did not align with the intentions of the Charter for Social Housing Residents in reducing stigma, nor would it properly describe the relationship the Council has with wider residents who receive or are impacted by Property & Housing services but who do not have a contractual relationship with the Council.
16. The **overall aim of the draft Resident Involvement Strategy** is divided into five key areas; this is demonstrated in [Figure 2](#).

Figure 2 – Five Aims of the Draft Resident Involvement Strategy



17. **Aim 1** - This aim underlines our view of our residents as partners in delivering the Strategy outcomes. We want to ensure that our plans, decisions and actions are made with your hopes and ambitions first and foremost in mind.
18. **Aim 2** - We want to make it as easy as possible for resident’s voices to be heard and for residents to have a say on housing matters which affect them.
19. **Aim 3** - We value the role that our empowered residents play in service delivery. We believe that our tenants and leaseholders should be kept informed about how we are performing, what decisions we are making, how we spend our income and should have opportunity to challenge us and tell us where they feel improvements are needed.
20. **Aim 4** - We are seeking to create open and clear communication channels between the Property & Housing Service and our residents. Whether residents are looking to provide feedback, make a complaint, or simply want to report a repair we are aiming to make communication as easy as possible for our residents.

21. **Aim 5** - We want to work with our residents to “Create Great Places Where People Want to Live”, where our Council housing and estates are viewed as privileged parts of the District and that residents are proud to call home
22. The Draft Resident Involvement Strategy and report considered by the Communities Scrutiny Committee on June 27<sup>th</sup> 2023 contained detailed information as to how, each of the Five Aims of the Draft Strategy would be met and, how this information would be communicated to customers.
23. Our **new framework for resident involvement** recognises that there is no ‘one size fits all’ for involvement and provides a suite of opportunities for residents to ‘Get Involved’ as little or as much as they wish, and at all levels, based on personal interests, expertise, time available and preferred communication channels. In many cases, involvement will be specifically tailored to meet the needs and wishes of our residents.
24. The resultant Framework approach as in [Figure 3](#) shows the wide range of ways we will work with, listen to and act upon residents’ views and how residents can directly influence decision making. This is not an exhaustive list and likely to evolve through continuous improvement and innovation. Feedback from all resident involvement activities will flow through local and strategic groups to ensure that resident voices are integrated in service planning, monitoring and improvement.

Figure 3 – Framework approach to Resident Involvement

<b>Stronger Communities Select Committee</b>					Purple Tier opportunities place residents at the centre of Council Member decision making processes.
<b>Tenant &amp; Leaseholder Panel</b>					Panels in the Yellow Tier act as a consultative and decision-making body.
Fire & Building Safety Panel	Scrutiny Panels	Focus Groups (Strategic/ Policy Matters)	Continuous Improvement Groups	Sheltered Housing Forum	Green Tier activities provide you with an opportunity to help review and shape the overall Property & Housing Service.
Complaints Scrutiny Panel	Recruitment Champions	Procurement Champions			
Estate Walkabouts	Resident Inspectors	Block/ Street Champions	Growing Champions	Meet Your Neighbour events	Orange Tier ranges from face to face, in-person activities to activities that you can engage with from the comfort of your own home.
Community Champions	Resident Writers	Armchair Reviewers	Mystery Shoppers	Annual Residents Conference	
Information Stations/ Informal Pop Ups	Surveys/ Polls/Focus Groups (Operational Matters)	Chatterbox Live/Online	Residents Associations	Community Events	Blue Tier opportunities enable residents to take part in one-off (or infrequent) events, as and when they wish to do so.
Social Media	Ad-hoc newsletters, leaflets, publicity	Webinars	Estate based consultation	Other consultation	Pink tier lists ways you can stay informed.
Handbooks	Annual RI Impact Assessment	Bi-Annual Newsletter	Complaints Reporting	Annual Report to Tenants & Leaseholders	Grey Tier shows the formal reporting/ information distribution which will serve to demonstrate how all of our activities are helping to shape the Property and Housing Service.

25. In view of the importance of this strategy, an external consultant was appointed to act as a critical friend throughout its development, to ensure that the draft RI strategy meets current and future regulatory requirements and industry best practice.
26. Appendix 2, provides a **glossary** of the proposed resident involvement opportunities under the new framework, together with an explanation of function, who can be involved, training available, as well as detailing the inter-relationships between the forums / activities
27. **Measuring Impact** - We will record the outcomes from every resident involvement activity and using an assessment tool called an "Impact Assessment", we will evaluate the effect of resident involvement and the difference it makes to services provided by the Property & Housing Service. These assessments will allow us to demonstrate to our residents the changes that have been made as a direct consequence of their involvement and will allow us to identify which involvement activities represent greatest impact and best value.

28. The Tenant and Leaseholder Panel and Resident Involvement Co-Create group will regularly review the progress made towards this strategy. The Strategy itself will be reviewed during 2027, or earlier if the need for significant revisions is identified.

### **Scrutiny Comments**

29. Communities Scrutiny meeting was held on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023.
30. The Committee held a thorough discussion, had a number of questions / points of clarity and provided feedback on the report / strategy. Headline questions, comments, and feedback are as below.
31. Questions from the Committee included
- a) How will a culture of resident engagement be embedded across services?
  - b) What type of decisions might be made by the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel (Figure 3)
  - c) Will there be an opportunity for Councillors/Members to part of the Resident Panels?
  - d) How will the strategy be delivered? I.e. is an Action Plan of activity/delivery elements of the strategy to be developed?
  - e) Can the Risk Management of the strategy be re-visited given the delivery plan is yet to be developed?
  - f) What support will be available for resident groups?
  - g) Is dedicated officer resource in place to support resident involvement
  - h) How can the number of residents engaging and responding to surveys be improved? It was noted the response rates of residents to the draft strategy was low.
  - i) Clarity was sought on the context/meaning of 'Ofsted' style inspections
  - j) How will the success of the strategy be measured?
32. Officers highlighted the new strategy presented residents with a more varied way of engaging with EFDC, and there was further work to be done on developing a Delivery Plan to bring the strategy to life. This will also link to the success measures of the strategy.
33. Officers highlighted the strategy, and its progress will be monitored. A review of the Terms of Reference of key resident scrutiny groups will be undertaken.
34. Officers committed to amend the reference to 'Ofsted' style inspections reference to that of the standards set out by the Regulator for Social Housing.
35. Officers highlighted the link between the Resident Involvement Strategy and the work in progress to launch the new approach to measuring tenant satisfaction – Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).
36. Officers' thanks the Communities Scrutiny Committee for their feedback and questions.

### **Resource Implications:**

37. To make sure that support and resources are available for effective involvement, we will provide grants to recognised Residents Associations to help with their set up, running costs and subscriptions for video conferencing platforms, as well as making available an annual budget allocation to fund minor estate enhancements
38. We will provide appropriate staff to support involvement activities. The Property & Housing Resident Involvement team will consist of:
- 1 FTE Team Manager (Tenancy & Estate Management)
  - 1 FTE Resident Involvement Officer (Tenancy & Estate Management Team)



- 1 FTE Resident Involvement Officer (Regeneration and Development)

39. Note – no additional funding/resource request is being made.

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

40. There is a Regulatory requirement to engage and involve customers as outlined in the executive summary above.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

41. The draft Resident Involvement Strategy ensures that residents are placed at the heart of decision making, thereby supporting the Council’s wider objectives around the safer, cleaner, greener agenda. In key areas such as Building and Fire Safety, the strategy will serve to support the Council in fulfilling its statutory obligations, whilst at the same time helping residents to feel safe in their homes.

**Consultation / Scrutiny Undertaken:**

42. The Portfolio Holder, Housing and Communities, the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel and Resident Involvement Co-Create Group, Officers and Members have been consulted and have responded positively to the draft Resident Involvement Strategy

43. A wider public consultation was undertaken between 5th December 2022 and 22nd January 2023, the findings of which are attached as Appendix Five and are noted to be, on the whole, a positive response to the proposed strategy.

**Background Papers:**

44. No specific background papers are attached. The results of the consultation exercises with Staff, Members and the Public have been appended to the Communities Scrutiny Report for 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

**Risk Management:**

45. Key risks and mitigations are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Risks and Mitigations

Name of Risk:	Risk:
Standards of Tenant Involvement and Empowerment	<p>Failure to deliver, leading to non-delivery of this strategy and/or breaches of regulatory requirements.</p> <p>Failure to consult, involve and empower residents to participate in service delivery could lead to mistrust, poor services and lower sustainability of communities.</p> <p>Reputational risk of not engaging residents.</p>

Risk Consequences:	Management and Mitigation
<p>Regulator Scrutiny and Intervention where there has been a failure to meet the Consumer Standards or could have caused, serious harm to tenants. In cases of serious detriment, this could result in a regulatory notice being published against the Council.</p> <p>Decisions are made without having full sight of resident opinion.</p> <p>Opportunities lost through poor reputation</p>	<p>Training and empowerment of staff and Members to deliver this strategy</p> <p>A commitment to reviewing the resources required to adequately resource the Strategy year on year</p> <p>Local teams delivering local activities and engaging residents</p> <p>A wide range of formal and informal involvement opportunities at all different levels</p> <p>A commitment to embedding resident involvement in everything we do</p> <p>Regular resident communications in a variety of formats</p> <p>By regularly monitoring the delivery of the strategy with our residents and the outcomes and impact of resident involvement activities</p> <p>By understanding who our customers are and their preferences</p> <p>Using technology and insights to reach as many residents as we can.</p>

**Equality:**

46. An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out and there was **no** significant impact.