

## Tenant Engagement Strategy 2021/26

### 1.0 Purpose

This Strategy sets out our approach to tenant engagement. It is informed by our vision and values and the TPAS (Tenant Participation and Advisory Service) National Tenant Engagement Standards (2021).

### 2.0 The importance of culture

Although there are regulatory standards to meet, it's the behaviours and attitudes which run through an organisation that set the foundation for positive outcomes, including effective tenant engagement.

Our vision and values enable us to set the right culture in which tenant engagement can flourish.

#### 2.1 Our vision

WFHA is working to deliver a future where everyone, in every community we serve, has a safe, truly affordable home and great life chances in a society where they are valued and respected.

#### 2.2 Our values

- We **RESPECT** people and communities through our belief in equality, inclusion and the value of diversity. We believe we have more in common than things that separate us.
- We **EMPOWER** people and communities by maximising strengths and opportunities and building resilience.
- We are **AMBITIOUS**, constantly improving, delivering better value for money and striving to provide more homes and services.
- We **CARE** about what we do, step up to take responsibility and are passionate about our social purpose and making a positive difference.
- We are **HONEST**, act with integrity and are accountable to our tenants, our partners and each other.

#### 2.3 Our approach to tenant engagement

- 2.3.1 A positive culture starts with the recognition of a mutually agreed role that shows the part tenants can play in the governance of WFHA.
- 2.3.2 True transparency and unhindered information sharing increases trust between tenants and landlords.
- 2.3.3 Continuous listening and learning allows us to respond positively to our environment and the changing needs of our tenants.
- 2.3.4 Meeting the diverse needs of tenants, removing barriers to engagement, and providing information in plain language is non-negotiable.
- 2.3.5 Providing a range of opportunities to engage, with appropriate support systems can produce more meaningful outcomes.
- 2.3.6 Acknowledgement and support for community-led solutions are a vital part of building local confidence and wider engagement opportunities.
- 2.3.7 With the right culture at its' heart, where inclusion is key, there are seven pillars to meaningful tenant engagement (see Appendix 1):



### **3.0 Context at the time of writing (October 2021)**

- 3.1 WFHA is a smaller provider, with 330 homes in Waltham Forest. Approximately half of our homes are general needs and the other half are provided in sheltered housing. We also have a very small amount of supported housing for people with learning disabilities that we provide in partnership with specialist agencies.
- 3.2 Like many smaller providers, because of our size we have historically struggled to attract, recruit and retain tenants who want to be involved in the development / improvement / scrutiny of services. This is despite frequent recruitment campaigns using different platforms, targeting specific groups, and, offering increasingly generous incentives.
- 3.3 Through 2020 and the coronavirus pandemic, several tenants who had previously left the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP), kindly temporarily returned to the TSP to help us to formulate and scrutinise our response to the pandemic.
- 3.4 Between early 2021 and September 2021, the TSP was dormant. However, following our most recent recruitment campaign, we have four new members and the first meeting of the newly formed Panel is scheduled for October 2021.
- 3.5 Throughout 2020 and in to 2021, we conducted monthly and then quarterly tenant surveys which included a question on how satisfied tenants were with our response to the pandemic – there was 100% satisfaction. Also, during the period we greatly improved tenant satisfaction with repairs, from 81% (STAR survey 2018) to 90%.
- 3.6 We engage an independent consultant to Chair the TSP and hope that the Panel will be able to recruit a Chair from tenant membership of the Panel at some point in the future.
- 3.7 Governance arrangements for the TSP are clearly defined in our Governance Manual and include a role profiles, Panel Terms of Reference and induction & appraisal processes.
- 3.8 We are improving communications and broadening our communication channels and will introduce a tenant portal and expand use of social media in 2022.
- 3.9 Our Human Resources, Remuneration and Governance Committee (HRRGC), along with Board, have repeatedly raised their concerns regarding the lack of tenant involvement and scrutiny. Various routes have been suggested to improve tenant engagement and these are included in the Action Plan attached at Appendix 2. Actions to be completed before the end of 2022 are to be prioritised, assigned owners and delivered to agreed timeframes.

3.10 Our commitment to improving tenant engagement is demonstrated in our Business Plan for 2021/24, through our first of four strategic objectives – *improved accountability*. The Plan, along with our Value for Money Strategy, sets targets for improvements in tenant satisfaction.

#### **4.0 Responsibilities**

4.1 The Chief Executive is responsible for delivery of this Strategy through annual action plans.

4.2 Progress against annual action plans will be reported to the Human Resources, Remuneration and Governance Committee and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel on a biannual basis.

4.3 The Chief Executive will review this Strategy every two years, or sooner if required by changes in Regulation, and seek Board and Tenant Scrutiny Panel approval for any revisions.



## **Appendix 1**

### **With the right culture at its' heart there are seven pillars to meaningful tenant engagement**

#### **1.0 Pillar one – Governance and transparency**

We will ensure that:

- 1.1 There is a clearly defined and agreed role for tenants in governance arrangements for WFHA.
- 1.2 There are clear, widely publicised routes for tenants to hold us to account on service delivery, strategy, performance and decision making.
- 1.3 There is an environment of mutual respect between our organisation and tenants with steps taken to identify and tackle negative stereotypes.
- 1.4 We regularly consider, and share publicly, how we use the learning from tenant engagement to improve the services we provide.
- 1.5 We provide regular assurance to our tenants about how we keep tenants safe in their homes and meet related regulatory and legal requirements.
- 1.6 We engage with tenants to produce an appropriate and meaningful Annual Report that includes tenant satisfaction measures, performance against our targets and relevant financial information.
- 1.7 There is consistent and open sharing of information with all stakeholders regarding the significant risks we face and how we plan to deal with areas of concern.
- 1.8 We consult with tenants at least every three years on the best way to involve tenants in the governance of WFHA and the scrutiny services & performance.
- 1.9 We publish clear information on the roles and responsibilities of all staff.

- 1.10 We promote Board membership to our tenants.
- 1.11 We have a range of diverse perspectives on our Board and staff team, including lived experience of social housing.
- 1.12 We champion equality, diversity and inclusion.

## **2.0 Pillar two - Scrutiny**

We will ensure that:

- 2.1 Scrutiny Panel activity works to the five TPAS Scrutiny Principles of; Independent, Inclusive, Positive, Constructive and Purposeful.
- 2.2 An appropriate and agreed scrutiny model and process is in place, with clear routes into governance and operational delivery of services.
- 2.3 We value our Scrutiny Panel as a critical friend and value the independent, tenant-led processes giving rise to scrutiny.
- 2.4 The Scrutiny Panel is supported to produce robust assessment and evidence-based recommendations that are designed to improve services and increase efficiency.
- 2.5 The Scrutiny Panel is provided with the financial and administrative support it needs to carry out its business.
- 2.6 The Scrutiny Panel is provided with all performance, regulatory, legal and benchmarking information it needs to carry out its business.
- 2.7 The Scrutiny Panel has strong links with other tenant engagement initiatives and the wider tenant base in order to support its overall aims.

## **3.0 Pillar three – Business and Strategy**

We will ensure that:

- 3.1 Tenants are meaningfully engaged in the co-creation, monitoring and review of the organisation's engagement strategy to make sure it delivers clear impact and value.
- 3.2 Tenants are meaningfully engaged in the development, monitoring and review of our services, relevant strategies (such as our Business Plan) and the strategic development of WFHA.

- 3.3 Tenants and staff are clear of the purpose and intended outcomes of all engagement activities with clear explanations of the time needed and their level of influence.
- 3.4 We have a clear and publicly stated plan for engaging tenants in our health & safety responsibilities and make clear those responsible for compliance.
- 3.5 There is an agreed timeframe to ensure that all engagement activities provide enough time to hear and consider tenant views.
- 3.6 There is a clear and consistent method for reporting back to tenants how their views have been considered in all engagement activities.
- 3.7 Tenants are consulted in a timely and effective manner on any change in landlord or significant change in the management arrangements of WFHA.

#### **4.0 Pillar four - Complaints**

We will ensure that:

- 4.1 There is a clear, accessible and continuously publicised complaints policy designed with tenants, that shows the definition of a complaint, how to complain, key timescales, routes for redress, how to access help and support and who has responsibility for the complaints process.
- 4.2 Information on the Housing Ombudsman is readily available for all residents and provides assurance of its compliance with the complaints handling code.
- 4.3 Complaints are encouraged as opportunities to listen, learn and influence change within a culture that assures that speaking out will not bring negative consequences.
- 4.4 Tenants are engaged in the continuous learning and development from complaints, with all improvements widely publicised to residents and staff.
- 4.5 Complaints, including those determined by the Housing Ombudsman, are documented, widely communicated and to all stakeholders.
- 4.6 Tenants are engaged in routinely reviewing the complaints handling policy & process to include self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

## **5.0 Pillar five – Information and communication**

We will ensure that:

- 5.1 Relevant information is provided to all recognised panels and involved residents in an agreed timeframe to allow them to monitor performance and hold us to account on how key organisational objectives are being met.
- 5.2 All information provided to tenants is clear and understandable with key points summarised, using an inclusive range of methods and in a format to suit the intended recipients.
- 5.3 In any ad-hoc or specifically focussed engagement activity, information is provided in an agreed timeframe before any activity takes place.
- 5.4 Our website holds easy to find and useful information on areas such as governance, regulatory judgements & inspections, compliance, how to get involved, management, repairs, complaints, performance and the impact made from its resident engagement activities.
- 5.5 We provide an accessible and unhindered route for tenants to request information relating to our activities. This will be widely publicised to reflect our tenant profile.
- 5.6 We will regularly distribute to all tenants up to date information including performance against set targets and emerging organisational challenges as well as topics of significant community and national interest. The frequency, content and methods of distribution will be agreed with our Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

## **6.0 Pillar six – Resources for Engagement**

We will ensure that:

- 6.1 We provide sufficient resources to deliver effective engagement and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel have the opportunity to influence the decision about the resources made available.
- 6.2 There is an appropriate system in place for recognition and reimbursement of the time given by residents for engagement activities.
- 6.3 Involved tenants are offered timely advice, relevant training and support, and where appropriate, effective mentoring.



- 6.4 Opportunities are made available for involved tenants to independently network to gather best practice in resident engagement and increase their awareness of the wider housing sector challenges.
- 6.5 All staff can describe the benefits tenant engagement can bring to WFHA, its tenants and the wider community and understand how their role can enhance the organisation's ability to hear the tenants' voice.

## **7.0 Pillar seven - Community and Wider Engagement**

We will ensure that:

- 7.1 There is an appropriate menu of engagement opportunities that; reflects the tenant profile; responds to the different needs in relation to equality strands and any additional support, which can be evidenced in the delivery of our services, engagement activities and communications to promote widespread engagement.
- 7.2 We will provide opportunities for tenants to engage in emerging social housing sector policy consultations and responses
- 7.3 Where development is planned or regeneration or planned improvements take place, tenants will be fully informed and from the start will be consulted throughout project planning and delivery.
- 7.4 There is a clear approach to promoting and supporting community action in the communities we have tenants.
- 7.5 Any community investment activities will support partnership working and provide opportunities to increase understanding of tenant and community priorities.



## Appendix 2 - Tenant Engagement Action Plan 2021/26

Pillar		Deliver by end 2022 and maintain going forward		Our vision for 2026	
1	<b>Governance and transparency</b>	1	Membership of the TSP is maintained – a minimum of 4 and maximum of 12 members	1	Tenants are engaged with us in tackling negative stereo types
		2	All members receive full inductions, regular 121 support and appraisals	2	Tenants are involved in production of our Annual Report
		3	Establish a positive relationship between the TSP and HRRGC	3	Tenants consider the risks we face as an organisation and how to deal with them
		4	Ensure a range of diverse perspectives on our Board and in our staff team	4	We have at least one Board member who is a tenant
		5	Publish learning from tenant involvement and scrutiny	5	Tenants have been involved in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and in reviewing our EDI Policy
		6	Continue to share information with tenants about how we keep tenants safe in their homes and meet regulatory and legal requirements		
		7	Consult with tenants on the best way to involve tenants in governance and scrutiny		
		8	Publish information on the roles and responsibilities of staff and Board members		
2	<b>Scrutiny</b>	1	Provide the TSP with all landlord performance information it needs, including benchmarking	1	A tenant chairs the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP)

		2	The TSP have an agreed work plan to end 2023 which includes review of this action plan and consideration of the Together With Tenants Charter	2	The TSP has strong links with other tenant engagement initiatives and the wider tenant base
		3	The TSP works to the 5 TPAS scrutiny principles of Independent, Inclusive, Positive, Constructive and Purposeful		
<b>3</b>	<b>Business and strategy</b>	1	Tenants and staff are clear about the purpose of all engagement activities, the time needed and level of influence	1	Tenants are involved in the monitoring and review of this Tenant Engagement Strategy
		2	There are a range of successful involvement routes (outside of the TSP) that suit the tenant profile	2	Tenants are engaged in the decarbonisation agenda in terms of their own carbon footprint and that of WFHA
		3	Periodic tenant surveys	2	Tenants are engaged in the strategic development of WFHA
		4	Report back to tenants on how their views have been considered and what changes have been made		
		5	Review our Service Standards and Commitments to Tenant with TSP input		
		6	Publish a plan for engaging tenants in our health & safety responsibilities		
		7	Create a plan with tenants for engaging tenants in the decarbonisation agenda		
<b>4</b>	<b>Complaints</b>	1	Continue to publicise our Complaints Policy and processes, and escalation routes, including to the Housing Ombudsman	1	Tenants are engaged in the continuous learning & development from complaints, with all improvements publicised to tenants and staff
		2	All staff encourage complaints because of a belief in complaints being opportunities to listen, learn and influence change	2	Tenants are involved in reviewing the Complaints Policy and processes

<b>5</b>	<b>Information and communication</b>	1	Update our website to add a tenant involvement area which includes TSP meeting dates and papers	1	All information provided to tenants is clear, using an inclusive range of methods and in a format to suit the intended recipients
		2	Continue to publicise performance against benchmarking and targets on an annual basis	2	The TSP are involved in the production of Tenant Newsletters and website content
		3	Continue to publicise emerging organisational challenges as well as topics of significant community / national interest (including climate change and decarbonisation)		
		4	Introduce a tenant portal and expand use of social media, text messaging etc		
<b>6</b>	<b>Resources for engagement</b>	1	Ensure involvement and scrutiny are adequately resourced both in terms of budget and staff time	1	Involved tenants have access to mentoring and are supported to network outside of WFHA
<b>7</b>	<b>Community and wider engagement</b>	1	Continue with consultation on the Chingford development and share feedback with the TSP in order to determine learning for other development projects – and share this information with tenants	1	We will provide opportunities for our tenant to engage in emerging social housing sector policy consultations and responses
		2	Invite Board members to shadow staff – on phones / voids inspections etc	2	We will have a clear approach to promoting and supporting community action in the communities we have tenants
		3	Invite Board members to participate in estate inspections	3	Any community investment activities will support partnership working and provide opportunities to better understand tenant and community priorities
		4	Consult with the TSP re an annual event where tenants, Board members, staff and other stakeholders are invited to attend		