

Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy 2025

Canterbury City Council

Introduction and purpose

Welcome to Canterbury City Council's Tenant Engagement Strategy.

We believe that good housing is about more than bricks and mortar – it's about people, communities and a sense of belonging.

This Tenant Engagement Strategy sets out how we will work together with tenants to shape the services that matter most to you, your homes and your neighbourhoods.

We know that the best decisions are made when tenants are part of the conversation from the start. That's why we're committed to building an open, honest and inclusive approach to engagement – one where all voices are valued, listened to and acted on, wherever possible.

This strategy is about making sure you have the tools, information and opportunities to influence decisions, challenge us when things go wrong and see the difference your feedback makes. Whether you want to be involved in a small way or take on a bigger role, we'll support you to engage in a way that works for you.

We've built this strategy with input from tenants and with your experiences at the heart of it. Over the coming months and years, we'll keep working together to make sure it grows, improves, and delivers real impact.

Legal and regulatory context

Over the past few years, the way councils and housing providers are expected to work with tenants has changed – and rightly so.

The **Grenfell Tower fire** was a heartbreaking tragedy that showed what can happen when tenants' concerns are ignored. More recently, **Awaab's Law** was brought in after a young child, Awaab Ishak, died from damp and mould in his home. His family had asked for help, but no one listened and the consequences were devastating.

These moments have rightly shaken the housing world. They've reminded everyone, from local councils to national regulators, how vital it is that tenants feel heard, respected and safe.

That's why new laws and rules have been introduced to make sure that housing services put people first.

Some of these include:

- **The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023**, which gives stronger rights to tenants and more power to the Regulator of Social Housing to step in when things go wrong.
- The new **Consumer Standards**, set by the **Regulator of Social Housing**, which all landlords must meet. One of these is the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. It means we must:
 - Give tenants clear, timely and useful information
 - Offer real ways for you to get involved and shape services
 - Listen to feedback and complaints - and act on them
 - Be open about how your voice leads to change.

These aren't just rules we must follow, they are things we believe in.

We've already made progress in several areas:

- We've created **Resident Engagement Strategies** for each of our high-rise buildings (Elizabeth Court, Margaret Court and Windsor House). These were shaped directly with tenants and focus on safety, building management and how residents are kept informed and involved.
- We've also launched a **Tenant Engagement Retrofit Strategy** to make sure tenants are involved in decisions about how we make homes more energy efficient. That

work came from honest conversations with tenants about comfort, rising bills and long-term improvements.

- And we're guided by our council's **Equalities Policy**, which means we're committed to treating everyone fairly and removing any barriers that might stop people from taking part, especially if you've felt overlooked or excluded in the past.

This strategy brings all this together.

Yes, it helps us meet new standards and laws but more than that, it's about doing the right thing.

We want you to feel that your voice matters, that your concerns are acted on and that you have a real say in how your housing service works.

Who is the Regulator of Social Housing?

The **Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)** is the national organisation that makes sure landlords (like the council or housing associations) are doing their job properly.

They set the rules that social landlords must follow, called Consumer Standards, to protect tenants and make sure homes are safe, well-managed and that tenants are treated fairly.

If a landlord doesn't meet the standards, the Regulator can step in to investigate or take action.

What are the Consumer Standards?

The **Consumer Standards** are four sets of rules that all social landlords in England must follow. These rules are designed to make sure tenants:

- Live in safe, good quality homes
- Can easily raise concerns or complaints
- Get clear, honest information from their landlord
- Have real opportunities to be heard and to influence decisions.

This strategy focuses especially on the **Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard** - the one that says tenants must be listened to, informed and involved.

Our vision for tenant engagement

Our Housing Promise

We'll put you and your safety at the heart of everything we do.

We promise to provide a housing service that:

- keeps you safe and your home well maintained
- listens to you and involves you in decisions
- treats you fairly, respectfully and with care
- supports you when times are tough.

We'll do our best to get things right first time and, if we don't, we'll fix it and learn from it.

In return, we ask that you:

- pay your rent or service charges on time
- look after your home and community
- be respectful to others
- let us know early if you need support.

Together, we can build safer homes, stronger communities and better services.

Our tenant engagement framework

We want tenant voice to be part of everything we do, not just a box to tick.

That's why we've created a clear Tenant Engagement Framework that shows how, where and when you can get involved, have your say and help shape the services that affect your home and community.

This framework reflects what the Regulator of Social Housing expects from us under the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard; and more importantly, it reflects what our tenants have told us they want:

- to be listened to early
- to see how their input leads to action
- to be able to influence real change
- to hold us to account when things don't work.

We use two main visuals to help explain how our engagement approach works. You'll see these included below.

1. Our engagement in action: early engagement and scrutiny

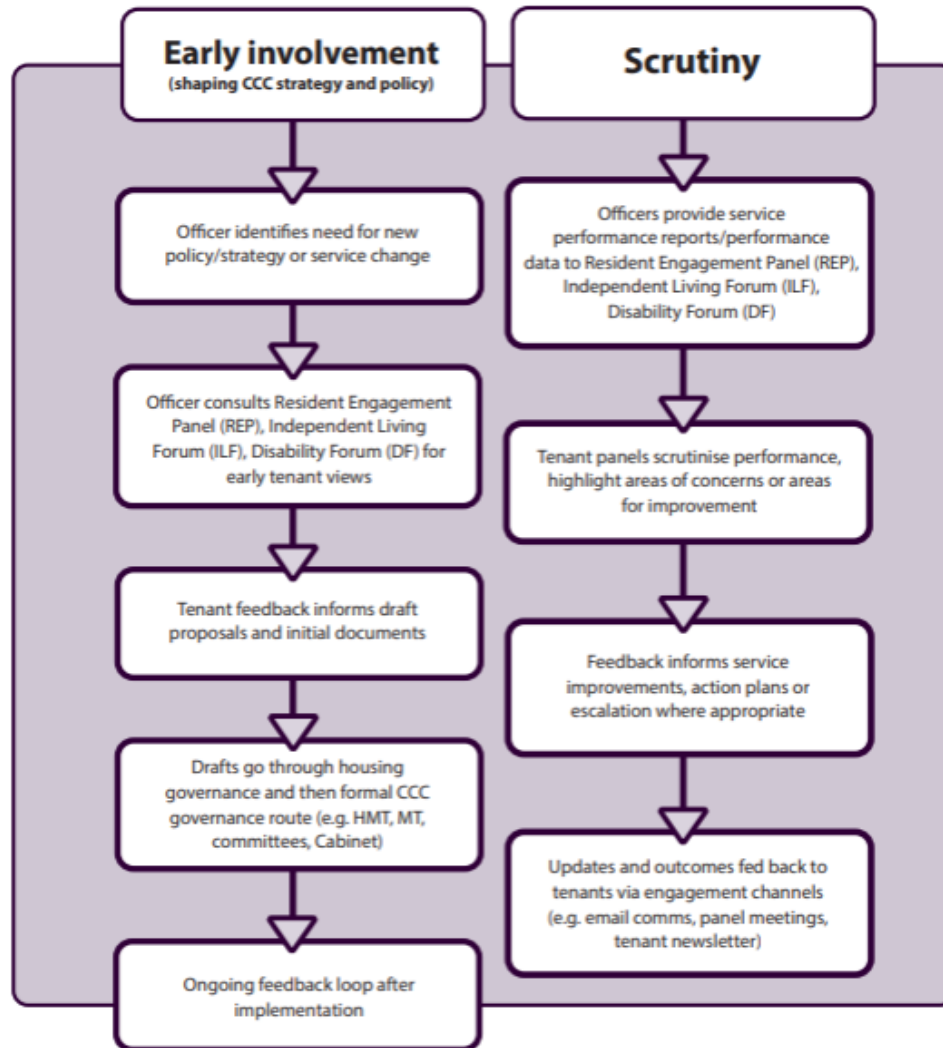
Our first diagram shows the full journey of tenant involvement. From shaping services at the very beginning, through to holding us to account later down the line.

On the left side it shows how tenants help shape strategies and decisions before they're made:

- when a new policy or change is being planned, officers bring it to our tenant panels early
- these groups share feedback and suggestions before a draft is written
- that input shapes the draft, before it's taken through formal council processes (like Housing Management Team or Cabinet)
- once implemented, we check back in with tenants to review how it's working and what needs to improve.

This cycle helps us learn from tenants and improve together.

Tenant panels' role in governance



2. Our Tenant Engagement Framework (2025 – 2028)

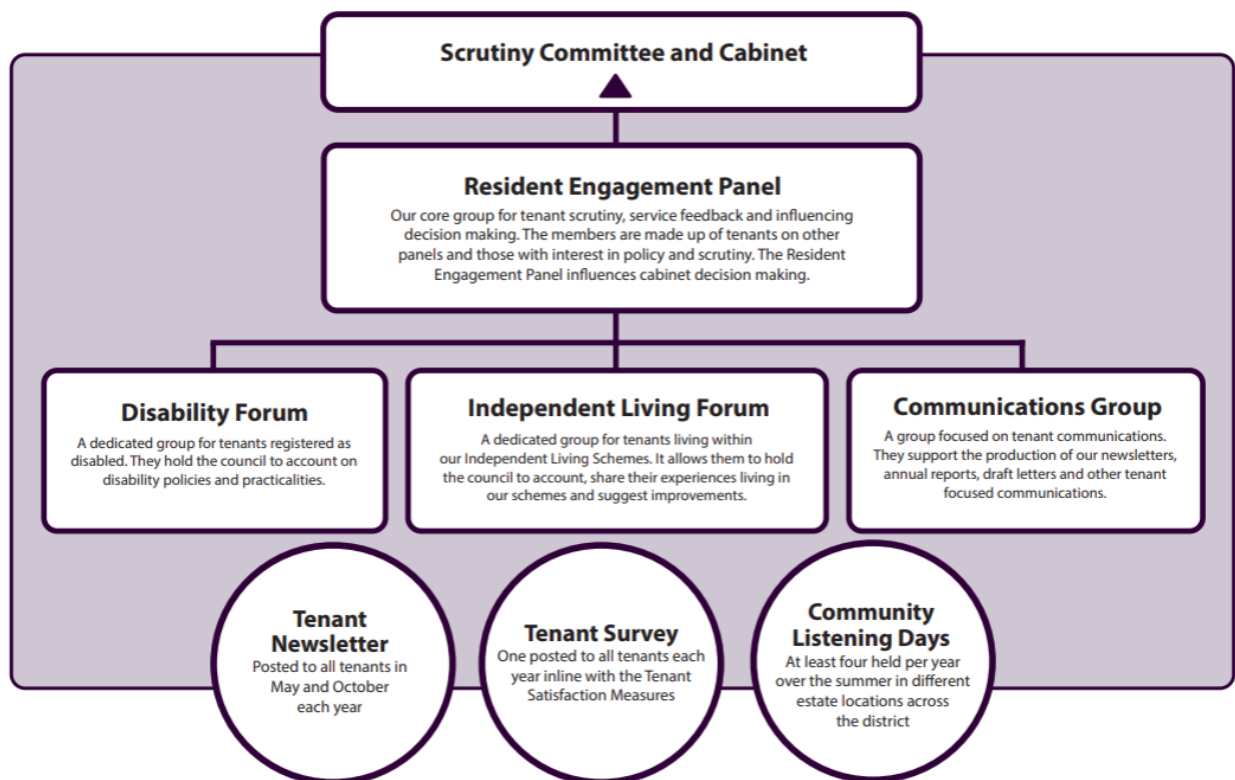
Our second visual sets out the formal structure of engagement across different levels, from information-sharing to meaningful collaboration.

This framework was shaped directly by tenants. We built it based on:

- feedback from our Tenant Engagement Review, which we carry out every three years
- results from the latest annual Tenant Survey
- insight and suggestions from our tenant panels and forums.

This means the structure reflects what matters most to you and gives you flexible, meaningful ways to get involved.

Tenant Engagement Framework (2025-2028)



We've grouped our engagement offer into two main types:

A: Ongoing tenant panels and forums

These are regular groups made up of tenants who help shape our policies and challenge how we're performing:

- **Resident Engagement Panel (REP)** - our central group for reviewing services, influencing decisions and highlighting areas for improvement
- **Disability Forum** – focuses on removing barriers and improving accessibility for tenants with disabilities
- **Independent Living Forum (ILF)** - brings together tenants in our independent living schemes to improve quality of life and services for older tenants
- **Communications Group** – ensures newsletters, reports and other communications are clear, accessibly and reflect what tenants want to see and read.

These groups work closely with officers, they influence key decisions and hold us to account.

B: Flexible ways to get involved

We know not everyone has the time or desire to join a group, so we also offer ways to take part when and how it suits you:

- **Tenant newsletters** – sent out to every household twice a year with updates, stories and ways to share your views.
- **Annual Tenant Survey** – a chance for all tenants to tell us how we're doing, what needs to improve and how we compare to national standards in line with Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
- **Community Listening Days** – held on estates across the district, where we come to hear your views face-to-face.
- **One-off surveys, focus groups or consultations** – when we need quick input on a policy or service change.

Together, this forms a **layered approach** – offering different ways to get involved, depending on tenants' interest, time and confidence.

Whether tenants want to give a quick opinion or get involved in shaping policy, there's a place for your voice.

Governance and accountability

These engagement routes aren't just symbolic, they're built directly into our governance processes.

Feedback and scrutiny from tenant panels is taken seriously. It informs:

- internal decisions by senior officers and housing management
- recommendations to Overview Committee
- reports to Cabinet (our main decision-making body)
- annual performance reviews and action planning.

In other words, tenant voice has a seat at the table.

Not just once either, throughout the entire cycle of service design, delivery and review.

Engagement happens everywhere

While this framework shows our formal routes, we also know that most of our engagement happens in day-to-day conversations:

- with housing officers
- through repairs and service calls
- through complaints, compliments or even a chat on the doorstep.

We treat all this as valuable insight and we're working to make sure that what we hear on the ground feeds into our wider council service improvement plan, and decision-making

Our strategic objectives

This strategy sets out five key objectives to strengthen how we engage with tenants and support them to shape the services that matter most to them.

These objectives reflect our commitment to listening, learning and acting on what tenants tell us, while making sure that everyone (especially those who are often underrepresented) has the chance to be heard.

Each objective also supports the wider aims of our council's **Consultation and Engagement Strategy**, helping to build stronger relationships, improve services and make sure that engagement is meaningful at every stage.

Together, they form the foundation of how we will promote transparency, influence and accountability across our housing services.

- **Objective 1: Keeping you informed about your home** (i.e. Ensure tenants have access to clear, timely and accessible information about their rights, services, performance and how their feedback is used to shape decisions)
- **Objective 2: Giving you real ways to have your say** (i.e. Provide meaningful and varied opportunities for tenants to influence policies, services and decisions that affect their homes and communities)
- **Objective 3: Showing we listen and take action** (i.e. Strengthen accountability by acting on tenant feedback, learning from complaints and demonstrating how tenants shape services)
- **Objective 4: Making it easier for everyone to join in** (i.e. Promote inclusive engagement by removing barriers to participation and ensuring all tenants have a voice)
- **Objective 5: Helping you feel confident to get involved** (i.e. Build tenant skills and confidence to engage meaningfully in shaping services and holding us to account).

Objective 1: Ensure tenants have access to clear, timely and accessible information about their rights, services, performance and how their feedback is used to shape decisions

We want to make sure you always have the information you need to understand your rights, the services you receive and how we're doing.

Having the right information at the right time is important. When you know what's going on, what services are available and how things are being run, you can make better decisions about your home and community.

It also means you can hold us to account, making sure we're doing what we should be.

We want you to feel confident and well-informed about your rights as a tenant and how we're performing.

If you're unsure about anything, we want to make sure it's easy to get the information you need in a way that suits you.

It's not always easy to find or understand the information you need. Sometimes, updates aren't clear, or they're hard to access depending on your situation.

We'll make our communication clearer, more regular, and easier to access. We'll share updates on your rights, services and performance in plain language. We'll offer information in different ways — like online, in print or by phone — so you can choose what works for you. We'll also look at how to make our digital information easier to use.

You've told us it's not always clear what happens after you give feedback. That can feel frustrating, like your views don't make a difference.

We'll explain how your feedback is used. We'll share updates on what's changed because of what you told us. We'll give real examples and publish clear summaries, so you can see how your input is shaping services.

Feedback shouldn't feel like a tick-box exercise. We know you want to see action, not just be asked for your opinion.

We'll create more chances for you to get involved in shaping services. Where we can, we'll work with you to design solutions together. We'll check in regularly so you can see what's happening and what's changing.

When you have the right information and can see how your voice is being used, we're building a stronger partnership — one that puts you at the heart of what we do.

Objective 2: Provide meaningful and varied opportunities for tenants to influence policies, services and decisions that affect their homes and communities

We want to make sure that you have real opportunities to influence the decisions that affect your home and community.

Your voice matters and we believe that you should have a say in the services you receive, the policies that affect you and the direction we take as a council.

Whether it's through consultations, focus groups or other methods, we want to make sure that there are meaningful ways for you to get involved.

By giving you the chance to influence decisions, we can create services and policies that truly reflect your needs and priorities.

When you feel like your opinions make a difference, it builds a stronger connection between you and the council, helping us create better communities together.

Tenants often feel like they don't have enough opportunities to have a real impact on decisions. We know that sometimes engagement can feel tokenistic, where tenants are consulted but don't feel their input shapes outcomes. This can lead to frustration and disengagement because it feels like your views are heard but not acted on.

We will provide real opportunities for you to influence decisions that matter. This will include things like surveys, scrutiny panels, and in-person opportunities such as community events. We'll also explore more digital ways to get involved, so there's a range of options to suit different needs.

Some people don't want or have the time to get involved, so a range of opportunities is needed to suit different preferences and situations.

We will offer varied ways to engage so there's always a way for you to contribute. We will also target underrepresented groups through tailored outreach and flexible methods to make it easier for everyone to participate.

Some tenants might not know about the opportunities to get involved. If you don't know when or how to have your say, it's hard to participate. This can limit who is heard and reduce the impact of engagement.

We will improve how we promote involvement opportunities. We'll make sure you hear about ways to engage through channels you use and trust, so you never miss a chance to contribute.

When feedback isn't acted upon or followed up on, tenants can lose trust in the process. We understand if you give us your feedback and nothing changes it can feel like it wasn't worth your time. This lack of follow-up creates a sense of disconnection, where tenants feel like they're just participating for the sake of it, rather than truly influencing decisions.

We will ensure feedback leads to action and that you see the results of your involvement. We'll provide clear follow-up on how your feedback has been used, be transparent about decisions made, and keep you updated on progress so you always know what's happening after you've contributed.

When you have real ways to get involved, hear about them clearly, and see your feedback lead to change, we build a stronger partnership.

Together, we'll create services and policies that truly meet your needs.

Objective 3: Strengthen accountability by acting on tenant feedback, learning from complaints and demonstrating how tenants shape services

We believe being accountable to you is key to building trust and improving our services.

When you take the time to share feedback or make a complaint, you should see that it leads to real change. Your experiences help us learn and do better.

We're committed to showing you how your voice shapes services and how we're learning from what you tell us.

It's not always clear what happens after you give feedback or make a complaint. You've told us it can feel like nothing changes, which can be frustrating and make you less likely to speak up next time.

We'll make sure feedback and complaints lead to action. We'll respond clearly, act on what you tell us, and show you what's changed as a result. We'll share regular updates so you can see the impact of your input.

When changes are made, they're not always communicated back. If you don't know what's changed, it can feel like your voice isn't being heard — even if we've acted on it.

We'll keep you in the loop. We'll clearly explain what's been done in response to your feedback — big or small — so you always know what difference you've made.

Complaints don't always feel like a chance to improve things. You've told us it can feel like the focus is just on fixing the issue, not learning from it or preventing it from happening again.

We'll use complaints to improve services, treating complaints as a chance to learn. We'll look at what went wrong, fix it and make changes so it doesn't happen again.

You're not always involved in finding solutions when things go wrong. When services don't meet your needs, it can feel like you're left out of the conversation, even when it affects you directly.

We'll involve you in making things better. We'll work with you to fix problems, especially when they affect multiple tenants. We'll also follow up after complaints to check you're satisfied and ask what we could do better.

Not everyone knows how to give feedback or raise concerns. If it's too hard or confusing to speak up, some people might stay silent and in turn, we miss out on valuable input.

We'll make it easy to speak up. We'll keep feedback and complaints channels simple and easy to use - online, by phone, or in person - so everyone can have their say.

When you see how your feedback leads to real change - and how we learn from complaints - you know we're listening. That's how we build trust, improve services, and stay accountable to you.

Objective 4: Promote inclusive engagement by removing barriers to participation and ensuring all tenants have a voice

We want every tenant to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, regardless of their background, experiences, or circumstances.

Everyone deserves the chance to have their say - no matter their background, circumstances or needs.

We want all tenants to feel confident, comfortable and able to get involved in shaping services and decisions.

That means removing barriers, being flexible and making sure the way we engage works for everyone, not just a few.

For many tenants, issues like lack of time, limited access to digital tools, language barriers, or even mobility challenges can make it harder for them to take part in consultations, meetings, or surveys. This can result in certain groups feeling left out or unable to fully engage in shaping their services and communities.

We'll offer different ways to get involved. You'll be able to take part in a way that works for you — whether that's online, by phone, in person or in writing. We'll also provide interpretation and accessible formats when needed.

We don't always know who we're not hearing from. At the moment, we don't have the full picture of which tenant groups are getting involved and which ones aren't. That makes it harder to reach everyone fairly.

We'll build a better understanding of who's taking part. We'll collect voluntary and confidential information to help us see who we're reaching — and who we might be missing — so we can improve how we include everyone.

Some tenants don't feel confident joining in. Formal settings can feel intimidating or unwelcoming, especially if you're not sure your voice will be heard or make a difference.

We'll make it easier and more comfortable to take part. We'll create safe, informal spaces like pop-ups and community cafés. If you need extra help — like advocacy or translation — we'll make sure you're supported.

We don't always know what's getting in your way. If we don't ask or listen properly, we might miss the things that make it hard for you to get involved.

We'll ask, listen and act. We'll talk to you about the barriers you face and work together on solutions that make engagement more accessible for everyone.

When it's easier for everyone to get involved, more people feel heard, and services improve for all tenants.

While we're still gathering some of the data we need, we're determined to keep improving and making sure that everyone's voice can be heard and valued.

Objective 5: Build tenant skills and confidence to engage meaningfully in shaping services and holding us to account

We want every tenant who wants to get involved to feel confident, supported, and able to make a real difference.

It's not always easy to speak up, especially if you're not sure how decisions are made or feel unsure about the impact you can have. We know that to get involved fully – whether it's attending meetings, reading performance info, or helping shape services – you need the right tools and support.

That's why we're committed to helping tenants build the skills and confidence they need to take part, hold us to account and help improve services for everyone.

Some tenants don't feel confident enough to get involved. It can be hard to speak up, especially if you're not sure how things work or what your role is.

We'll help build skills and confidence by offering training, information sessions and peer support to help you take part, ask questions and make your voice count.

If information is confusing or full of jargon, it's harder to challenge or shape services. You need to understand what's happening before you can influence it.

We'll keep things simple and transparent. We'll use plain English, be honest about what's working and what isn't and offer support, so you're not left to figure things out alone.

Opportunities to build skills aren't always accessible to everyone. We know that not everyone can get to meetings or join online and that can limit who gets involved.

We'll make support easier to access by covering travel costs where needed, offering printed resources and exploring flexible options like local drop-ins, shorter sessions and online materials you can use at your own pace.

Some tenants don't think engagement is for them. You might not see yourself as the 'type' of person who gets involved, or feel like it's always the same voices being heard. That can put people off from taking part.

We'll show that everyone's voice matters. We'll work to build a more inclusive culture around tenant involvement, by using real stories from a range of tenants, making opportunities feel open and welcoming and showing the impact of everyday voices like yours.

Resources are limited, so we need to be realistic. We can't do everything at once, but we want to make what we do offer really count.

We'll focus on what matters most. We'll start with the areas where support can have the biggest impact and work with tenants to make the best use of time and resources. We'll also look at working with partners to bring in extra support where we can.

We want you to feel confident, informed and supported to take part in a way that works for you. When tenants have the tools to get involved, we're all better placed to shape stronger services together.

Action plan

Delivering our objectives

This strategy sets out five key objectives for how we'll work with tenants to improve services and make better decisions together.

But words alone aren't enough, what matters is what we do.

To make sure these objectives lead to real, lasting change, we've created a clear action plan.

This plan sets out exactly what we'll do to bring each objective to life and what you can expect from us.

For every action, we've included:

- Our commitment – a specific action that supports one of the five objectives
- What this means to you – how this will benefit you as a tenant or make your experience better
- Timeline – whether it's already happening, or a medium/long-term action
- Status – whether it's already underway or planned.

This approach helps us stay focused and transparent. It also gives tenants a clear view of how we're putting the strategy into practice and where we're heading next.

The table below sets out how we'll turn our objectives into real action, making sure your voice leads to better services and stronger communities.

Commitment / action	What this means to tenants	Timeline / priority	Status
Objective 1: Keeping you informed about your home			
Publish annual update on housing performance in the tenant newsletter	You'll clearly see how services are doing and what we're doing to improve	Annual – with Oct newsletter	Underway
Review and improve how information is shared (e.g. noticeboards, website, newsletters, email)	You'll be able to access updates in ways that suit your needs	Mid-2025	Planned
Develop a new tenant-friendly guide to rights and services	You'll have one clear and accessible place to find key information about your tenancy	Ongoing – Tenant Handbook in preparation	Underway
Objective 2: Giving you real ways to have your say			
Maintain and promote a menu of involvement options	You'll know exactly how to have your say in a way that works for you	Ongoing	Underway
Launch targeted engagement with underrepresented tenant groups	More diverse voices will shape decisions that affect everyone	Late-2025	New
Consider setting up local pop-up engagement points in key neighbourhoods	Easy drop-in spaces to share your views and hear updates in a way that works for you	Ongoing / planned for summer 2025	Planned
Objective 3: Showing we listen and take action			
Share 'you said, we did' updates based on tenant input and complaints	You'll see exactly what's changed based on your feedback	Annual – with Tenant Survey	Underway
Publish anonymised complaints learning and actions annually	Complaints help us improve and you'll see how	Mid-2025	Planned

Involve tenant scrutiny panels in reviewing outcomes of engagement activities	You'll help track whether changes really reflect tenant views	Every 3 years (TER), could be more frequent	Underway / planned
Involve our tenant scrutiny panels in reviewing complaints to learn from these quarterly	You'll help track whether we're improving on complaints and how we can get better	From 2025	Underway
Objective 4: Making it easier for everyone to join in			
Carry out an inclusion audit of tenant participation	Helps identify who's not being reached and why	Early 2026	New - priority
Provide accessible formats and interpretation on request	Whatever your needs, you won't be excluded	Ongoing	Underway
Set up informal engagement spaces (e.g. coffee mornings)	Friendly, local spaces where more people feel comfortable sharing views	Early 2026	New
Explore hybrid meeting opportunities for our panel/forum meetings	Face-to-face is a great way to hear your views but we recognise this doesn't work for everyone	Mid-2025	Planned
Objective 5: Helping you feel confident to get involved			
Offer annual tenant training and induction sessions	You'll feel confident understanding how services work and how to influence them	Early 2026	New
Introduce a buddy scheme or peer support model for new tenant representatives	You'll have someone to support you as you get started	Conduct feasibility review by December 2025	Planned
Provide support with travel, childcare or materials for those taking part	It'll be easier to join in, whatever your situation or circumstances	Ongoing	Underway

