



Tenant Participation

Strategy 2017 - 2020

Introduction

Newington Housing continually aims to provide the best possible service to our tenants. We recognise that both participation and local accountability, along with the feedback we receive from all our stakeholders, are essential tools for assessing how we operate, deliver change and adapt to ensure essential services are provided to everyone residing within the communities we serve.

We wish to encourage people to participate in the activities of Newington Housing in a way that suits them. We would like to see our tenants become actively involved in shaping the services we provide.

We made a commitment in our Business Plan for 2017/18 to introduce a Tenant Participation Strategy that will establish a framework to make this happen.

We recognise that some of our tenants are already involved in participation through local community or resident group or scheme forums; however we aim to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say in the delivery and development of our services.



A message from our C.E.O & current Tenant Forum Chair



As Newington Housing's current Chief Executive Officer, I wish to welcome the direction now being taken by local government to actively encourage, support and promote tenant participation and community led empowerment.

For a number of years, as a local community based organisation, we have worked tirelessly to embed a culture and community ethos into our organisation and have actively shown an interest in the communities we served.

Tenant Engagement and community empowerment have been at the forefront of our business objectives and processes for many years. We treat all feedback we receive from our tenants and other external stakeholders as a vehicle to influence policy, processes and the strategic direction of our organisation. Also through the valuable feedback we received, we have adapted the services we provide, with the objectives of continually providing a high standard of services and achieving outcomes which have undoubtedly improved the quality of life for all.

From a tenant perspective, I would encourage everyone to engage in the opportunities we are promoting within this document. It might be that you cannot commit to assist in the review of NHA's policies and procedures and provide recommendations and feedback, or be available to attend training opportunities, formal meetings, conferences, seminars, training, public events,; but may be available to help plan and deliver community initiatives or provide feedback to tenants on certain issues of concern.

On behalf of Newington Housing, we look forward to working in partnership with all interested parties over the coming years ahead.

Anthony Kerr



As the Chair of Newington Housing's Tenant Forum, I am delighted to confirm we are progressing well. After initial support from Empowering Communities, as a group, we are continually building and strengthening our own levels of capacity.

I can report that over the coming months, both I and other Forum members aim to set our own targets and objective for the year ahead.

This structured approach will allow us to focus on key areas of Newington Housing's core business processes, such as the reviewing service delivery standards, developing community engagement projects, the reviewing of policies and processes, the evaluation and distribution of funding to local community organisations and projects, etc.

Finally, as a tenant, I would encourage others to actively participate in any way they can, as by doing so it will help promote local empowerment and improve the services which we currently avail of.

Stephen Graham



NHA Background & Current Engagement

Newington HA was formed over 40 years ago and is considered a community based Housing Association. All our properties are located within North Belfast, with our offices located in close proximity to all our homes.

We currently own and manage nearly 700 homes with an additional 55 homes currently under construction. Newington Housing has always sought the views of its tenants and has worked progressively

to engage locally to deliver its services and this strategy aims to build upon this work.

We have built relationships and joint working partnerships with existing local resident groups to support our tenants and the wider community.

We also actively engage in multi-agency partnerships and forums with local residents groups as well as statutory agencies such as the Police, the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council.

Our Tenant Participation Menu of Options

We aim to put our tenants at the heart of everything we do. This strategy will outline our objectives and commitments that are necessary to achieve this goal.

Some steps have already been taken by Newington Housing to date. All tenants have been contacted and asked to join the Forum, which has now been established with the guidance and support of Empowering Communities.

Working with the Forum we now hope to develop additional opportunities for all tenants to participate, such as:



Be available to complete telephone questionnaires / surveys

Individual focus groups to review NHA's Services



Joining the Tenant Form



Assist in reviewing NHA policies manually or electronically, via emails



Reviewing Maintenance performance standards by our Contractors

Review/Verify findings of Annual Satisfaction Surveys.



Reviewing Housing Management processes you may have availed of

Participate in Mystery Shopping exercises



Estate walkabouts



Developing Tenant Participation In Northern Ireland

This new Tenant Participation Strategy sets out 10 principles of good participation in Northern Ireland. These are based on:

What social landlords should do;
How tenants' capacity for greater participation will be developed and supported; and
What government will do further to lead this development?

The measures outlined in this part of the strategy apply to all Social Housing Providers and their tenants in Northern Ireland. The strategy does not replace any existing legal duties that apply to landlords.

Principles For Tenant Participation

All parties must be committed for tenant participation to work effectively. Everyone needs a clear understanding of what participation is trying to achieve. It should build meaningful relationships between landlords, tenants and the wider community. It must also promote good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

The 10 principles below set the context for the measures that follow.

- 1** Tenant participation comes from and promotes a culture of mutual trust, respect and partnership between tenants, board members and staff at all levels. It exists when all these interests work together towards a common goal of better housing conditions and housing services.
- 2** Tenant participation is a continuous process. Participants share information, ideas and influence. They work towards a common understanding of problems and a consensus on solutions.
- 3** Good tenant participation is about sharing information. All participants need to have all the information available to consider issues properly. That information needs to be clear, timely and accessible. Information must be in a form that all participants can understand.
- 4** Decision-making processes should be open, clear and accountable.
- 5** Tenant representatives should have enough time to consider issues properly. They should have the opportunity to work out a common view before meeting landlord representatives.
- 6** The landlord must recognise the independence of tenants' organisations.
- 7** Good working relations evolve gradually so must be flexible to adapt to local circumstances.
- 8** Tenants' organisations need adequate resources for organisation, training and support.
- 9** Tenant participation in rural areas must suit the particular circumstances and needs of rural tenants.
- 10** Tenant participation must meet the requirements of legislation on equality and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Effective tenant participation methods, developed and delivered by landlords who have engaged, supported and have listened to their tenants' needs (including where tenants are living with disabilities), will remove barriers arising from ethnicity, geographic location, special needs, language differences, learning difficulties, age, sexual orientation or disability.

What We Intend To Do

We aim to put our tenants at the heart of our decision making process, to build upon our existing good practices and to increase the extent and effectiveness of tenant participation within our organisations.

To help achieve this, we recognise that many different things are needed. We will

- » Put tenants' views at heart of our decision making process
- » Listen, act and provide feedback to tenants on what you tell us
- » Provide a range of options for tenant involvement, via our Menu of Involvement
- » Ensure the promotion and expression of our community ethos, ensure all staff embrace this strategy and ensure the involvement of all staff in the development of meaningful participation
- » Review our practices and how we operate and act positively to feedback
- » Commit to the provision of adequate resources to deliver all aspects of the Strategy.

WHAT ARE OUR OBJECTIVES WITHIN THIS STRATEGY ARE:

- » To ensure that tenant involvement is at the centre of what we do.
- » To develop and establish regular and meaningful opportunities for all our tenants to partake in.
- » To provide tenants with the support they need to promote tenant participation, local empowerment and community cohesion.
- » To promote partnership working between Newington Housing, tenants and the local community to deliver effective and meaningful improvements to the local environment.

By developing and delivering our strategy for tenant participation; we will ensure that tenants and other users are made aware of and are clear about the participation activities, the strategic approach to tenant participation and are encouraged to become involved in any way they can.

As a social landlord, we will develop a tenant participation strategy which is adaptable to a changing environment, which suits our business needs and requirements and which provide various opportunities for participation for all tenants.

TENANTS HAVE A CHOICE IN:

- » The areas they want to participate in;
- » The level of participation; and
- » Whether to be involved as an individual or part of a group.

TENANTS SHOULD ALSO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE:

- » Policy decisions that will affect them;
- » Decisions that will affect their general area or community;
- » Services that they receive as an individual user; and
- » Their landlord organisation's business planning and identification of future priorities.

Tenants, particularly under-represented groups, are encouraged and will be supported to become involved. We will provide suitable training and other support mechanisms to meet the needs of any specific tenants.



Supporting Tenant Involvement

Newington Housing is committed to supporting any tenant interested in partaking in initiatives which will promote tenant engagement, either by helping them access training to ensure they have the skills to contribute confidently and effectively or by providing financial support incurred by tenants.

We will continue to build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders involved in community development to assist tenants and tenants' groups, when required.

We have set aside financial resources to support tenant involvement. Our tenant participation budget will generally include funding for the following activities:



Regular training for tenants, staff and Board members



Provide suitable/ accessible venue to hold meetings and provide refreshments



Provide secretarial support at Forum meetings



Travel costs and childcare activities (with supervision) when tenants are attending Forum meetings



Provide transport to attendance at training courses and conferences

We will also make available staff time and administrative/office facilities to support and encourage tenant involvement.

The Different Levels of Participation

Newington acknowledges that due to other personal commitments, some tenants may not have any interest in engaging at all, whilst others may only be interested in providing feedback to us when assessing our service standards and that others are already actively involved in various local initiatives/groups; however there may also be an appetite from

others to have a say in how our policies and practises are developed or how we operate on a day to day basis.

We have considered this when developing our “menu of options” which outlines what participation levels are available to every tenant. These participation levels are summarised below:

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2
LOW LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT: You will receive regular and up to date information, participate in the completion of surveys, provide feedback and keep us up to date on what is the best way to communicate with you.	MID LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT: You can consider developing or joining an existing established local Residents Group with a view to developing different types of social activities within the local community (i.e. organisation and delivery of community fun days, promote local activities and engagement opportunities, etc.).
LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
HIGH LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT: You can participate in a Tenant’s Forum, carryout Policy Reviews, participate in Mystery Shopping exercises and Review Management & Maintenance performance standards.	STRATEGIC LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT : Join the Board of Management and other opportunities which specifically looks at the work of Newington Housing, scrutinises our activities and policies and engages in our business for the benefit of all tenants.

LEVEL 1

LOW LEVEL INVOLVEMENT

Newington Housing will provide timely, relevant information so that tenants are well informed and equipped to participate and provide feedback by:

Completing Annual Satisfaction Surveys

You will receive an Annual Report by October each year highlighting our performance; the actions we will take to improve; and to celebrate our successes

We will incorporate a section within our Tenants Newsletter specifically focusing on the activities with our sheltered schemes

We will use our website to give details of our housing service and how to be more involved as tenants in enhancing our service delivery.

We will issue our newsletter, twice a year with tenant involvement in its content where possible.

We will produce, provide and distribute a range of leaflets and other information.

We will support local newsletters to inform on local issues with funding (if appropriate), staff time and resources.

We will update our Tenants Handbook when required to provide relevant information.

We cannot meet the challenges set out in this Strategy without the input of our tenants and to make sure that everyone who wants to get involved in Tenant Participation can, we will:



Advertise opportunities within both internal and external local publications, via emails, text messaging, social media, etc.



Make sure our information is attractive and available in relevant formats



Continue to link with existing community groups to improve our communication with our tenants and to identify issues of concerns so we can act promptly to address them.

By engaging with us at this level, and by taking an interest in how we perform, you can provide the platform that influences and enables us to improve. For example, by simply responding to our annual tenant satisfaction survey, you will give us a steer on how to make improvements to the services you receive.

LEVEL 1 (COMMITMENT OF YOUR TIME)

By engaging with us at this level and by taking an interest in how we perform, you can provide the platform that influences and enables us to improve. For example, by simply responding to our annual tenant satisfaction survey, you will give us a steer on how to make improvements to the services you receive.

By committing to Level 1 engagement, we will ask you take the time to respond to our tenant service surveys, attend scheme specific tenant meetings, and contact us to keep us up to date with your email address, mobile number and personal details, to facilitate automated communication and also to follow us via other social media platforms; such as Facebook and Twitter.

By engaging at this level you will help deliver service improvement; help us meet your needs through communication and information that is available when you need it; assist us to meet our environmental goals in the production of less waste paper and help us to achieve value for money and in return keep rents and services charges low.

LEVEL 2

MID LEVEL INVOLVEMENT

DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING RESIDENTS GROUPS

Over the next 4 years we are committed to assist in the development of new or supporting established Residents Groups in the local area.

We can help you set up or introduce you to an existing group in your scheme or area. This is a great way of getting to know more people and improving your neighbourhood. We are happy to help and consult with formal and informal groups of our tenants.

Many groups can attract finance through grants and other means. Newington Housing is committed to providing resources, training and financial support to help new groups to get up and running. By keeping you involved we want to use your experiences to put you at the heart of decision making by providing a range of options for how to get involved in what affects you and your neighbours.

Jointly, we can organise twice yearly walks around your scheme to discuss and help progress any communal issues you may be having. We will advise you of these visits and welcome you to accompany us.

Our staff will, when possible, attend local events to promote Newington's tenant participation. Whether it's attending a local mother and toddlers' group, a pensioner's club or a community fun day, we'll be happy to attend.

By doing so, this will allow our tenants to have a better say in how we deliver and improve our services.

LEVEL 2 (COMMITMENT OF YOUR TIME)

Level 2 Involvement requires a greater level of commitment from tenants than Level 1 as you will be required to assist group(s) to become established and sustainable and this commitment would extend to:

- » Being involved in organising or attending regular meetings;
- » Being involved in organising or attending community activities;
- » Representing tenants at Newington Housing focus groups and other such activities

Through a group structure you will:

- » Make you feel more involved and take ownership of what you do;
- » Provide tenants with an opportunity to feel more involved, empowered;
- » Make a positive impact locally for you and your neighbours;
- » Help improve community cohesion;

Newington Housing has already established strong relationships with existing Residents Groups, throughout North Belfast. If anyone is interested in becoming more involved in their local residents group, or who may wish to set one up in their individual scheme, can you please contact us directly on 028 9074 4055 and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have or signpost you in the right direction.

LEVEL 3

HIGH LEVEL INVOLVEMENT

As part of our new strategy we are aiming to establish a more formal tenant based group called The Tenants' Forum. Tenants Forums, when effective can scrutinise performance, help review existing and develop new policies and can lead on initiatives to improve our organisation for the betterment of everyone.

Our Tenants Forum members will keep you up-to-date and become involved in improving our delivery of services to you. The Forum's focus will be to improve our services, service standards & performance. Members' views will influence service improvements and how we review and assess the impact to changes we incorporate into our day to day delivery of services to you. Formal members can say what services interest them and how they want to be contacted.

A Sheltered Tenants Forum (i.e. a sub group of the Tenants Forum) could be asked to consider issues specific to sheltered housing and thus feed their finding to us via the main Forum. We will consult Forum members via a variety of methods.

These will include:

Tenant questionnaires on particular issues

Satisfaction surveys by post, phone, email, web & face to face interviews

One off meetings, called focus groups, to focus on looking at specific issues

Tenant inspections to assess performance and recommend change where necessary

A scrutiny panel

Satisfaction Surveys Satisfaction surveys can be issued to assess any part of our service. The results will be monitored and reported in our annual report and through our newsletter to all tenants. **Focus Groups** is where we invite Tenants Forum members to short, one off meetings to discuss a specific topic/issue.

The Tenant Forum's role is:

- » to challenge our service standards and performance;
- » assess our performance, and
- » aid Newington Housing to report our performance to DFC and tenants.

Continued next page...

LEVEL 3

HIGH LEVEL INVOLVEMENT Continued...

We will provide training on governance, measuring performance standards, methods of gathering and reporting performance information and housing law and practices and offer practical opportunities to assess our services. Newington Housing will support tenants to undertake inspection of our services. For example, a group of tenants will look at an area of our housing service to identify what works well and what could be done better or improved. This will include training, the paying of expenses and staff support.

To help you to become involved, we will:

- » Try to assist you in acquiring child care, so you can attend activities
- » Ensure our facilities and activities are accessible
- » Support tenants to access training
- » Provide information to keep you informed
- » Supplying re-paid reply envelopes when asking for views by post;
- » Provide transport to meetings or events where required;
- » Payment of relevant expenses when tenants are carrying out approved tenant participation activities;
- » Provide access to photocopying and related office services;
- » Provide transport/or pay the expenses to get to activities
- » booking conference venues, designing and issuing publicity, and facilitating the event;
- » staff time to attend meetings etc. and generally to support and facilitate participation;
- » helping tenants to attend relevant training, or arranging local training;
- » a tenant participation budget to cover the above items and to fund questionnaires and major survey. Please contact our Housing management Team for more information

We will set a designated budget to provide tenants with training on relevant services and to go to housing conferences and other events to boost their knowledge and experience and feedback good practices.

The Tenant Forum can assist in the review our TP Strategy, performance, resources, and can assist in the construction of a calendar of events. With support and guidance, the Forum can develop indicators to measure our Strategy's progress that are linked to standards developed for reporting to Department for Communities.

By becoming a member of our Tenant's Forums you will become more self-confident and feel more empowered to influence decision making within the organisation.

We will ensure you are properly constituted with, properly supported and that the strategy and Forum are well managed. To this end we are committed to ensuring that sufficient resources are put in place to support this aim.

LEVEL 3 (COMMITMENT OF YOUR TIME)

Level 3 Participation, can require a higher level of commitment, as you will be required to attend regular Forum meetings; training, seminars and event, etc.; however we can tailor opportunities for you to engage, which suits what level of commitment you can give.

LEVEL 4

STRATEGIC LEVEL INVOLVEMENT

Newington Housing is governed by a Board of Management, which is made up of volunteers, who give their own time to enhance all aspects of governance within Newington Housing.

During the lifetime of the strategy, we aim to support the development of Newington Housing tenants' to become involved with the work of the organisation at Board level.

A tenant who becomes a full member of a management board will play an integral role in the decision making process within the organisation.

Over time, those whom develop an interest in joining our board will receive significant personal investment and high level support from our staff team.

LEVEL 4 (COMMITMENT OF YOUR TIME)

Level 4 Participation will require a significant commitment, as you will be required to attend regular quarterly board meetings and other business review meetings, training events, seminars, influencing policy and the strategic direction of Newington Housing.



How We Will Measure Our Performance

Throughout the term of the Strategy, we will record information about our activities on our internal systems. This will allow us to produce a variety of different reports which will identify initiatives with produce high levels of involvement, areas of good practice and measured outcomes.

We will test our existing current strategies to meet the expectations of the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2015 to 2020.

We will develop an action plan to promote tenant engagement and participation initiatives within our strategy.

We will monitor and evaluate the delivery of this Tenant Participation Strategy by reporting progress against action plan on a regular basis at:

- » Sub Committees and Full Board Meetings
- » Senior Executive Team Meetings
- » Residents/Tenant Forum Meetings
- » In DFC & NIFHA returns and publications

What tenants can do if they are not happy about how the Tenant Participation Strategy is implemented

Tenants can...

- » ask that their concern is included on the agenda of any recognised tenant group or via the Tenant Forum;
- » raise their concern whilst responding both directly or indirectly to satisfaction surveys or feedback requests either online, by telephone or via written communications
- » raise their concern directly with Newington Housing's management;
- » use our complaints procedure

How Tenants Will Be Supported To Become Involved

Evidence from other jurisdictions have shown it is important that tenants receive support that is independent of their landlords. Tenants should be given the skills, support and encouragement to be able to embrace opportunities to participate.

The objectives of both DFC and Newington H.A strategy are to raise the levels of tenant engagement across the housing sector and to make sure that tenants are supported.

With this in mind we have acquired professional support from Empowering Communities, who have recently been appointed as the Independent Tenant Organisation for Northern Ireland. It is envisaged that with their guidance and support, any tenant wishing to partake will be personally develop and equipped with the skills needed to ensure effective participation.

All staff we employ, regardless of which part of the service they deliver, has a responsibility to deliver this Strategy's aim. Making tenant participation part of everyone's job strengthens the staff/tenant relationship and improves services.

For most staff, their role is limited (most of the time) to encourage tenants to take part in activities, listening to and passing on views and providing feedback on how tenants' views are used. Others will have more specific roles relating to groups or activities, which will be identified as required.

We have employed a community engagement officer.

- » supporting and organising training for tenants on TP activities
- » helping tenants establish groups;
- » overseeing and planning participation, and

- » monitoring and reporting progress towards achieving our Strategy's aims.

Our tenant participation budget will be agreed by our Management Committee each year to ensure effective delivery of the Strategy's actions including:

- » the work of the Tenant Forum
- » reporting our Annual Return to our tenants;
- » our newsletters and any local newsletters;
- » costs of activities, including:
 - transport, childcare costs and out of pocket expenses;
 - venue hire and catering costs; and - advertising/promotional costs
 - external conference places for tenants;
 - training for tenants;
 - independent surveys and consultancy; and
 - setting up and support (grants, printing, photocopying, etc.) to local groups.
 - secretarial support

To ensure our activities are well coordinated, we will develop and publicise a calendar of events to:

- » prevent staff and tenants from being overburdened
- » allow for proper advertising of activities; and
- » combine activities where suitable

The calendar will be publicised on our web site, sheltered scheme notice boards and in our tenant's newsletter.

Our Equal Opportunities Statement?

We value involvement that reflects the whole of our tenant population.

We are committed to treating people respectfully, fairly and equally, tackling discrimination and harassment and ensuring our services are accessible irrespective of race, religious belief, disability, gender, age or sexual orientation.

We will make sure all groups and individuals have equal access and opportunity to engage in activities.

We require all groups and individuals involved with tenant participation to act to promote equality and welcome participation from all our community.

To this end, and in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we actively seek to remove barriers to tenant participation arising from people with:

- » Different religious beliefs
- » People of different political opinion
- » People of different racial groups
- » People of different ages
- » People of different sexual orientation
- » Men and women generally
- » People with a disability and people without
- » People with dependents and people without

We aim to ensure that our involvement opportunities are accessible, that our written material is clear and easy to understand, and that we do not present any other barriers to involvement.

We will provide information for tenants in other languages and formats such as audio or large print where tenants need it.

We will provide information in ways that are easy to understand for tenants with limited or no reading skills where tenants need it.

We will ensure that all of our tenant groups recognise the importance of equal opportunities and seek to involve all those who are eligible to join them.

For further information on Newington Housing's Equality Policy and Equality Scheme please contact our office for details.

Newington Housing Association Board of Management & Tenant Forum Membership

Newington Housing is run by a Management Committee made up of local people who work on a voluntary basis. They meet regularly to discuss and decide policies and to oversee the work of Newington Housing.

It is our goal to acquire one or more tenants of our recently established Tenant Forum to become a member of our Management Committee.

Anyone who is interested in the work of Newington Housing Association and is interested in becoming a member of our Tenant Forum can acquire a Membership forms and further details at our office.



Feedback & Questions

Newington Housing welcomes all feedback and questions you may wish to submit to us in respect of the strategy.

If you are interested in becoming involved contact us:

In writing or in person:

Newington Housing Association
300 – 302 Limestone Road
Belfast, BT15 3AR

By Telephone: 028 9074 4055

By Email: admin@newingtonha.co.uk

www.newingtonha.co.uk

Publications

A copy of the DSD Tenant Participation Strategy can be found at the link below:

www.communitiesni.gov.uk/publications/tenant-participationstrategy-northern-ireland-2015-2020

An Easy Read Version can also be acquired at the link below:

www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/tenant-participation-strategy-2015-2020-easy-read.pdf

Or alternatively by contacting the Department for Communities directly at:

Department for Communities

Causeway Exchange, 1-7 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7EG

Tel: 028 9051 5262

Text phone: 028 9052 9304

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Other sources of reference and good practice for Tenant Participation:

Empowering Communities Enterprise Ltd

34-36 Henry Street, Ballymena BT43 5PS

Tel: 028 25645676

Email: sheenagh@empoweringcommunities.ltd

Newington



Housing Association

300 – 302 Limestone Road,
Belfast, BT15 3AR

Email: admin@newingtonha.co.uk

Phone: 02890 744 055

Fax: 02890 747 624

(9:00 am – 5:00 pm on weekdays)

Closed on Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays

Out of Hours Emergency Number:

0800 731 3081

Newington Housing Association N.I Ltd is registered in N.I. with Industrial & Provident Society (IP158)
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