



HILLINGDON
LONDON

**Tenant and Leaseholder
Engagement Strategy
2022 to 2025**

Contents

Page

Introduction..... 3

The results we want to achieve..... 3

Performance monitoring and evaluation..... 3

National Context..... 3

Local Context..... 4

Inclusive involvement..... 5

Resources..... 6

Financial resources..... 6

Staffing resources..... 7

Priorities..... 7

Our new approach to resident engagement..... 8

The six standards..... 9-11

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Introduction

This draft tenant and leaseholder (resident) engagement strategy covers the period 2022 to 2025. It has been developed in partnership with residents and staff and sets out a new approach to resident engagement in the Borough. It ensures that there is a 'golden thread' of engagement and involvement running through the services we deliver to our residents and communities, from our Councillors to our frontline staff.

This strategy underpins our commitment to use resident engagement to improve our services by placing the 'resident voice' at the heart of what we do and enabling staff to 'hear' those voices by working in partnership with residents to share power and influence change.

The results we want to achieve

Housing is important to people and their quality of life.

It's essential that we understand residents' views to help to shape and improve housing conditions and services. We want to make sure that residents really:

- know the different ways they can become involved
- can take part and influence decisions
- have the support and resources they need to take part
- can help to improve and deliver quality services

Performance monitoring and evaluation

Progress will be measured by monitoring and evaluating:

- residents' understanding of the ways they can take part and influence decisions
- the support and resources provided for residents to take part, and
- resident satisfaction with services provided by analysing survey results

The Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee will receive an annual report for this three-year strategy for engagement, which will provide an update on the implementation of these recommendations, further actions, and continued direction of travel, supported by the latest data on resident engagement and feedback.

National Context

Under section 105 of the Housing Act 1985, the Council has a legal obligation to consult with its secure tenants on matters of housing management such as changes to the management, maintenance, improvement or demolition of homes let by them, or changes in the provision of amenities.

Under section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 as amended, the Council also has a legal obligation to consult with leaseholders regarding certain qualifying works and services where the Council intends to pass on the cost of works and services to leaseholders under the terms of their leases. These legal obligations should be seen as a statutory minimum.

The new Charter for Social Housing covers seven outcomes that social housing tenants should expect from their landlords:

1. **To be safe in your home.** We will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
2. **To know how your landlord is performing,** including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
3. **To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,** with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. **To be treated with respect,** backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.
5. **To have your voice heard by your landlord,** for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
6. **To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in,** with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. **To be supported to take your first step to ownership,** so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

In addition, the Housing Ombudsman plays a vital role in providing support to residents when things don't go quite to plan. It resolves disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords (housing associations and local authorities) and their landlords. It is mandatory for all local authorities and registered social housing providers to be members of the Ombudsman Scheme. Residents and landlords can contact the Ombudsman at any time for support in helping to resolve a dispute. Its service is funded through annual landlord subscription fees. Hillingdon Council is a Member of the Ombudsman Scheme.

Local Context

LB Hillingdon Council currently has circa 10,100 homes classified as social housing, with a further 3,200 long leaseholders making a total of 13,300 properties in management. These numbers have remained steady in recent years as the Council has acquired or developed new accommodation to offset 'Right to Buy' sales.

Hillingdon is situated in west London and borders Harrow, Ealing and Hounslow.



Inclusive Involvement

The equality Act 2020 provides Britain with a discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society. This means that the Council will aim to engage with all of our residents, in an inclusive manner promoting fairness, respect and equality for everyone. We will aim to break down barriers which have prevented people from engaging in the past. Specifically, we will

- Consider the needs of equalities groups, proactively involving under-represented groups
- Ensure any barriers to participation are taken into consideration
- Treat people respectfully, fairly and equally across all areas of our business, and tackle discrimination and harassment in all of our activities
- Inclusive involvement underpins the objectives within the strategy, and engaging with hard-to-reach groups continues to be a priority within the service

Some groups of tenants and other residents are often under-represented in community involvement, including:

- Young people
- Refugees and ethnic minority groups
- Gypsy and travellers
- People with accessibility needs
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people
- Homeless service users
- The digitally excluded

We will build on our approach to involving under-represented groups in the next three years and we are committed to removing barriers to participation. We will do this by:

- Providing transport for residents to attend events where requested
- Holding meetings in venues that are accessible, convenient and secure for everyone, including people with mobility issues
- Establishing meeting times to take account of the needs and preferences of local communities
- Providing training to give tenants, residents and service users the appropriate knowledge, and provide specialist assistance as required. This training includes awareness of equality issues
- Providing Council contact numbers charged at local rates
- Providing opportunities for all residents and age groups to get involved
- Ensuring all information is provided in accordance with our accessibility policy to ensure that complex statistical information doesn't lead to non-participation
- We can also provide documents in different formats. Interpreting facilities are available, and hearing loops are available in Civic Centre meeting rooms
- Ensuring adequate funds are provided to develop the key issues agreed with tenants, residents and all service users, and considering appropriate ways of enhancing resources, including the provision of a Freepost address to eliminate postal expenditure.

Resources

The Council will provide direct and indirect funding to support resident engagement, ensuring a value for money approach. This will include direct support from council officers as well as financial support for local residents groups and other engagement activities.

The 'Better Neighbourhood Fund' will be reviewed and developed to meet the needs of communities. In addition, a learning and development budget will be developed to provide training and personal development opportunities for residents so that they can engage and influence effectively.

Via the approval and adoption of the Hillingdon Engagement Charter (HEC) we will aim to ensure financial certainty for the funding of resident engagement over three year timeframes

We have the following resources dedicated to involving our residents:

Financial resources

In partnership with residents, the Service will aim to ensure that the level of resources available meets the needs, aspirations and priorities of residents across all areas of engagement and support the delivery of the Hillingdon Engagement Charter.

The Resident Engagement budget will be ring-fenced to fund activities such as:

- Consultation exercises, such as our STAR survey
- Information for residents, such as our annual report, Hillingdon People
- Independent advice and assistance from specialists
- Training and attendance at events, for both staff and tenants
- Administration
- Tenant expenses, such as transport to events

All eligible Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) can apply to the Resident Engagement Team for an annual grant to support the development and running of their group.

They must provide information with the application, including current audited accounts, a constitution, contact details and minutes of their most recent Annual General Meeting and meetings.

The grant can be used to pay for day-to-day expenses such as postage, stationery, advertising, and travel. Additional funding can be requested and will be considered by the Resident Engagement Team.

Staffing resources

The Resident Engagement Team are dedicated to supporting and developing resident engagement across the Council's housing portfolio. Their functions include:

- Co-ordinating resident engagement
- Working with other services to enhance involvement
- Providing specialist advice within the service and to residents
- Training and developing staff and residents
- Facilitating tenant and residents meetings
- Encouraging participation with under-represented groups

Aside from this dedicated resource, various parts of the service engage with our tenants and leaseholders on a regular basis and consult on a number of topics in their specialist service areas.

Priorities

Key priorities over the term of this new Engagement Strategy will be:

- the reformation of regular meetings,
- making it easier for all residents to become involved and ensuring that they are updated on actions taken because of their feedback
- an increased focus on ways for residents to become involved locally, such as Community Engagement Days' held on estates or public spaces, alongside partners and other Council services (such as the Community Safety Team, Green Spaces and Anti-Social Behaviour and Environment Team), to ensure a coordinated approach to engagement, resolution of neighbourhood issues, and collation of resident feedback
- bringing the benefits of the internet to all residents while continuing to provide traditional methods of contact for those who are not online
- developing and delivering the 'Better Neighbourhood Fund' programme
- clarifying and developing the role of special interest groups
- developing and strengthening resident scrutiny of services through new service improvement groups which could include, for example,
 - Business Plan Implementation Group
 - Repairs and maintenance Service
 - Communication and Information

- Value for Money – Scrutiny Group
- Housing Support
- Income Collection
- Empty Property Management
- Estate Management

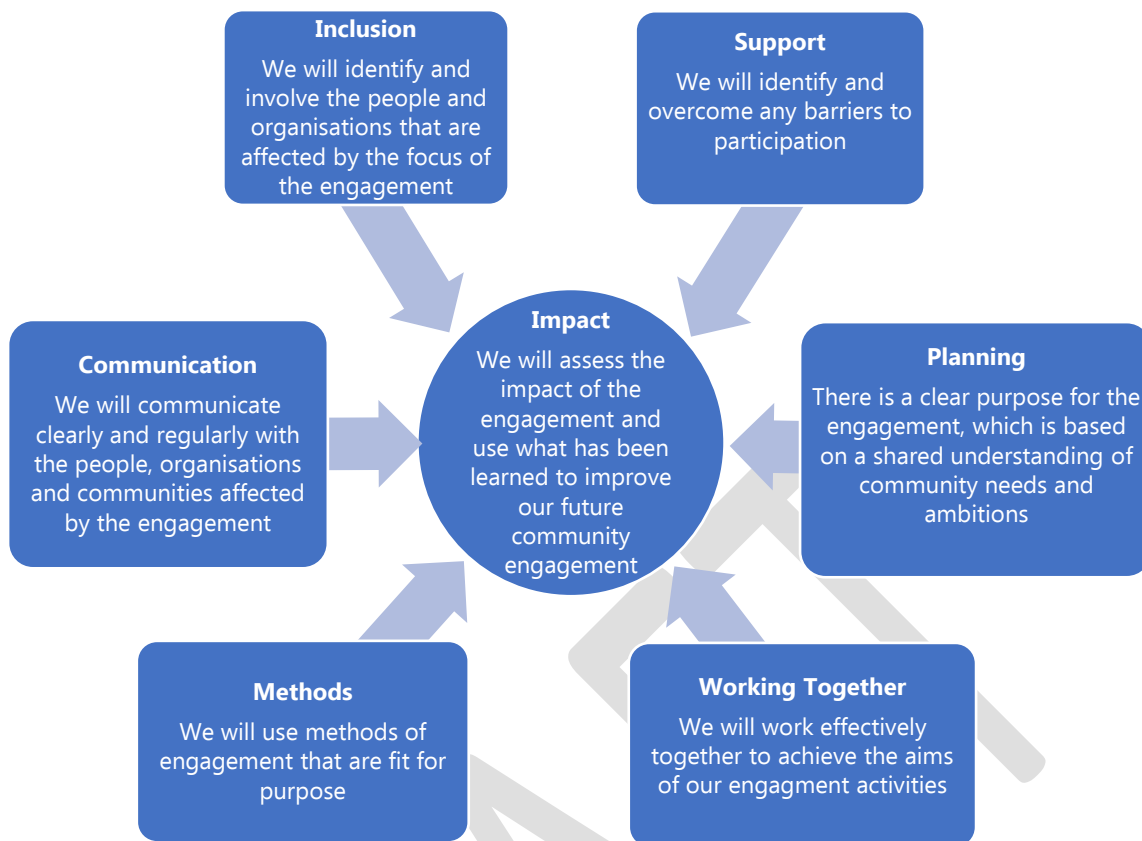
Representation on these groups allows tenants and leaseholders to impact on service delivery in real time and gain an understanding of our policies and procedures.

Our new approach to resident engagement: Developing the Hillingdon Engagement Charter (HEC)

Our new approach to engagement will put the ‘resident voice’ at the heart of our service planning, improvement and delivery. We will share decision-making power with residents by creating the Hillingdon Engagement Charter (HEC) which sets out residents’ expectations for service standards and our commitment to deliver these.

Our commitment in 2022 to 2025 includes a review of staff professional development and training to ensure that a refreshed culture of hearing the customer voice is rolled out across the Council. This will link to the outputs produced from the current government review of staff training and qualifications within the housing sector and the professional standards launched in 2021 by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH).

Using the model below, the Charter will focus our engagement activities on making an impact for our residents and in our communities.



The six standards that we will use to underpin our Charter are:

1. Planning: there is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions

- Planned engagement activities will be devised and agreed fully with active residents; we will listen and act, not impose our views about what should happen
- Our engagement activities will be underpinned by our annual action plans which will set out our annual priorities for the three years of this strategy. They will be founded on the priorities of our residents in local communities, with a reference point to current national regulatory priorities
- Planning timeframes will enable genuine participation and influence by residents to occur at a pace that suits them
- Where meetings are planned, lead residents or council staff will ensure venue accessibility and arrangements are in place in advance and that all attendees are informed beforehand

2. Working Together: we will work effectively together to achieve the aims of our engagement activities

- The Charter will establish ground rules for staff and residents about our agreed expectations of behaviour and attitudes when working together. These will be based on fairness, respect and equality
- Staff professional development and training will ensure we have skilled, committed and knowledgeable staff committed to working in partnership with tenants to achieve successful outcomes from our engagement activities
- Training will be provided for residents and could cover methods of engagement, influencing and negotiating skills, housing policies and regulatory requirements
- At the start of any engagement activities e.g. scrutiny of services, we will ensure that clear objectives, outcomes and outputs are agreed with residents
- Staff will always commit to providing feedback to residents about what happened to the views and opinions they expressed and how these have been incorporated into Council documents or ways of working

3. Methods: we will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose

- Methods will be resident-led with their preferences laying the foundations for our approaches, but we will aim to be modern, agile and responsive to meet their needs
- We will incorporate methods such as:
 - in person meetings with key staff
 - residents' associations
 - estate walkabouts where they will have greatest impact
 - digital participation e.g. social media, resident feedback
 - estate or block surgeries
 - estate or block champions
 - environmental projects
- We will gather residents views using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter
- We will provide translation and other accessibility services on request

4. Communication: we will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement

- Our written and verbal communication will be jargon-free
- Staff will take time to explain technical information so that residents have the time to consider it and ask questions
- Our action plan will set out our intentions for periodic communication with residents either across the Borough or by community or estate
- We will always provide contact details for lead officers involved in projects as well as the resident engagement team
- Housing staff will work with staff in other Council services to ensure their commitment to the standards of communication agreed with residents are adhered to, no matter which Council service the resident is engaging with

5. Inclusion: we will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement

- With specific projects such as estate improvements or regeneration we will establish early communication with those residents affected. This will be prior to any definitive plans being discussed amongst Council staff
- We commit to involving residents in estate and community issues from the project initiation stage

6. Support: we will identify and overcome any barriers to participation

- As referenced on page 2, we will ensure our engagement activities adhere to the principles of inclusive involvement, enabling all tenants and leaseholders to engage with us in the method of their choice and according to their preferences

7. Impact Assessment

Using these six standards we will assess our **Impact**.

- We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what has been learned to improve our future community engagement

On an annual basis we will complete an impact assessment of our resident engagement activities, which will include:

- Survey results and their analysis
- Transactional survey feedback from residents
- Reviewing our Hillingdon Engagement Charter and its impact
- Reporting to the Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee about how we have implemented residents recommendations

This impact assessment will be included in the annual report to the Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee.