



Wigan[♥]
Council

Together we're empowered and making a difference

Tenant Voice and Engagement Strategy

Date: 2024 - 2026

Foreword

Firstly, I would like to thank everyone that has been involved in our new Tenant Voice and Engagement Strategy, particularly the many tenants who have shaped this document.

Ensuring that you feel heard, valued, and involved is at the heart of everything we do, it's been a real pleasure working with so many of you on this key strategy. You have made it clear what is important to you and you are quite rightly holding us to account to provide the best services, in homes and neighbourhoods that are safe and well-maintained.

Over the past 18 months, we've increased our efforts to get more involved with you and your areas, through our dedicated teams that work across the borough particularly the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team. They've been out in the community, listening to your feedback and learning about your needs.

We are very optimistic about what we can achieve together, but we also recognise the challenges we face in housing, especially with the current cost of living crisis. To really understand how these challenges affect you, we need to learn from your experiences, your suggestions, and ideas. We're committed to being transparent and accountable to you for the services we provide.

This new engagement strategy outlines how you can get involved, influence decisions, and help us continually enhance our services for you. It's also great to hear what's working well, so please continue to share this, along with your ideas. Together, we will make a real difference.

Cllr Susan Gambles

Portfolio holder for Housing and Welfare
Wigan Council

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Our Vision

“Our vision is for our tenants to be involved as active participants in the shaping, design and delivery of the services which matter to them. We want to ensure that tenants are placed at the heart of everything that we do, and that together we create the space for wide-ranging inclusive, accessible, and transparent engagement to ensure that a contrast of aspirations, expectations and needs are met by a diversity of views, skills, and experiences.

We believe that places and communities thrive best when residents are empowered and supported to contribute and influence decisions affecting their own future, benefiting from a range of individual and collective skills, and tackling problems together with a shared purpose, to improve outcomes for all and to provide safe, quality housing.”

Background

National Context

There has never been a more important time for tenant engagement than we are facing at the moment, from the aftermath of covid, rising homelessness and the cost of living crisis, it's crucial that we listen to the views of our tenants to ensure we are providing the best quality housing services, that we are value for money and that your homes are safe, and maintained to the decent homes standard. Without this we cannot expect our communities to thrive.

There have been several national changes through government policies that have strengthened the requirements for tenant engagement:

- The Charter for Social Housing (white paper) – a charter of seven standards that social housing tenants should expect from their landlord (see below).
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 – legislation that sets out the changes, to reform and strengthen the way tenants can influence services they receive.
- The Hackett Review – Following the Grenfell tragedy in June 2017, the government commissioned an independent review of building regulations and fire safety. The government agreed to all 53 recommendations, these were adopted in the buildings safety act which became law in 2023.

- Regulatory standards – A public body that sets the regulatory consumer standards that social housing providers must comply with.
- Housing ombudsman – resolves complaints and disputes between tenants and social housing providers.

It is important that we listen to our tenants' views and act upon the information we are provided with. The Government's new charter sets out seven key areas:

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 them to account.
3. **To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,** with access to the Housing Ombudsman who has authority to 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 home ownership,** if this is something you want to obtain, should your circumstances allow.

Local Context

The Wigan Housing Strategy 2020 outlines our overall plans and ambitions to ensure we are providing high quality, affordable and accessible homes for all.

It shapes how Wigan Council, collaborating with our partners and communities, will ensure that our borough has the right homes; new and existing, for the right people in the right places.

It acknowledges the multiple areas of our lives that housing can impact and sets out how our healthy housing plans will help to ensure housing meets the various support needs of our residents. Providing healthy and secure accommodation for people within vibrant, connected and safe communities.

Wigan Council manage and maintain the 21,000 properties in Wigan. Our homes span across the whole of the Wigan Borough. Previously the housing stock was managed through Wigan & Leigh Homes (WALH) who were an arm's length management organisation (ALMO). The housing stock returned under the management of the council following consultation in 2016.

In 2022, following the changes from the Housing Regulator and the Social Housing White Paper that emphasises the importance of engaging and listening to the views of our tenants, Wigan Council created a dedicated Tenant Voice and Engagement Team to work alongside our tenants to rebuild tenant engagement and to ensure that our tenants voices are heard, listened to, and acted upon in shaping our housing services.

Tenants can get involved in our housing services, in a variety of ways. The term 'Tenant Voice and Engagement' is used to describe many methods of involvement, from seeking views, scrutinising our services to tenants supporting their own communities.

Wigan Council has demonstrated commitment to involving tenants, by listening to concerns and aspirations, whilst developing the wider Housing Business Plan. The input from tenants is seen as pivotal to the success of the organisation and will lead to shared benefits such as:

- Improved services that meet tenants needs
- Cost effectiveness and improved accountability in service delivery
- Increased levels of tenant satisfaction

The Tenant Voice and Engagement Team have been consulting with our tenants over the last 12 months to make sure our new engagement strategy is in line with the requirements of our tenants and Wigan Council. As well as complying with the new policies and procedures set out through the government and housing regulator bodies. To date we have:

- Completed over 200 engagement surveys
- Held focus groups and community events
- Listened to the views of our Housing Advisory Panel and tenant voice volunteers
- Listened to the feedback from our Tenant Satisfaction Surveys (over 4,600 responses)

This strategy acknowledges where we are now, where we want to be and considers the ways in which tenant voice and engagement can increase, develop, and improve. We will continue to listen to our tenants and will update our strategy in accordance to changing needs.

We will look to achieve this through

- Strengthening and improving current tenant engagement structures to enable increased participation.
- To actively promote opportunities for tenant participation internally to housing staff and externally to tenants, councillors, and our partners.
- Ensuring all tenants and housing staff have access to relevant training about voice and engagement and understand the benefits.
- Encourage input from all tenants in the co-design and delivery of maintenance and improvement works in their area.
- Raising awareness of equal opportunity issues and adopt a targeted approach in consulting hard to reach groups, actively removing barriers to participate.
- Ensuring there are adequate consultation processes in place, which are constantly reviewed, and that tenants' rights to consultation, information and devolved powers are made known to tenants and leaseholders.
- Strengthening links with the wider community by supporting corporate and community wide strategies.
- Constantly monitoring, reviewing, and refreshing this strategy.
- Ensuring feedback from surveys, consultations, complaints and service agreements are given in a timely manner and are easily understood and openly publicised.

What do we mean by tenant voice and engagement? What are the benefits and why do we need a strategy?

In simple terms *tenants are involved and supported to have a voice and share opinions on the housing services we provide*. Feedback is key to understanding the requirements of our tenants and how we can shape our services, ensuring that our tenants are at the heart of everything we do.

The strategy emphasises the importance of our tenant voice and how we can work together to increase, develop, and improve tenant engagement. How our tenants can directly influence and shape the future delivery of the housing services we provide, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction.

It also sets out the key engagement opportunities we will take to accomplish this and how our tenants can hold us accountable to the promises we make.

Effective tenant voice and engagement can have many benefits but more specifically can help to increase tenant and staff satisfaction levels, increase

value for money, improve our communication and build a more trusting relationship, allowing us to work in partnership.

How will we know it's making a difference?

At Wigan Council we pride ourselves on working with our tenants to make sure we co-produce and consult on the services we provide, to ensure our tenants receive the best service in a way that suits their needs. Listening to your feedback and working together is essential in providing a great housing service.

We will monitor the impact the strategy makes by measuring the ongoing improvement of:

- Increased tenant representation at volunteer opportunities
- Increased opportunities available to meet all our tenants' requirements and ensure our tenants are at the heart of all that we do
- Feedback from our engaged tenants and volunteers
- Staff understanding the importance of tenant voice and proactively seeking to encourage engagement.
- Increased satisfaction results across the Tenant Satisfaction Survey, in particular:
 1. Overall tenant satisfaction in housing services
 2. Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenants' views and acts upon them
 3. Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them
 4. Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect
 5. Contribution to your neighbourhoods – improving spaces and places that mean the most to you and increasing tenant led activities

Although the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team will be responsible for driving the engagement strategy, it is essential that all housing staff proactively support our tenants to get involved and have their say.

To ensure we are transparent with our findings and how we report our performance data, the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team will submit any reports and data to be scrutinised through The Housing Advisory Panel and the Scrutiny Panel. We will also work with our tenant voice focus groups to discuss our findings and agree on any improvement plans.

How you can get involved

We encourage our tenants to get more involved, have their say and to help shape services. We promise to provide opportunities that will suit everyone, no matter how much, or little time they have to spare.

Tenants can get involved with us on many levels, by completing surveys, and consultations, attending face to face meetings and forums or joining volunteer panels. We endeavour to make getting involved a simple process and will try to accommodate any individual needs.

To ensure your voice is heard, we will provide the following:

- Access to the Housing Advisory Panel members (for advice and support)
- Consultation – face to face, surveys and meetings to discuss significant changes that may affect you as a tenant
- Contact details for your Tenant Voice and Engagement Officer
- We will develop and promote new volunteer opportunities that meet both our tenants and the councils' requirements
- We will support and promote tenant and resident associations and local community groups
- We will develop, support and recruit to our existing volunteer opportunities
- We will work with our tenants to support any other forms of engagement they feel would develop the relationships between tenants, wider community, and the council

We understand that not everyone wishes to get involved but that everyone should have their voice heard, if you would like to discuss anything on a one-to-one basis, please get in touch.

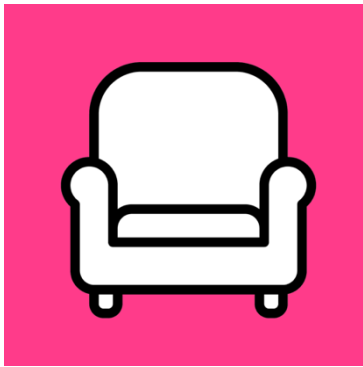
Challenges to tenant engagement

We face several challenges to achieving effective tenant engagement. Our tenants lead busy lives and finding time can be difficult, so we will use as many different tools as possible to enable all our tenants to get involved, however they choose. We can offer a variety of times, mediums (such as digital) and locations (including your own home). We can also cater for different abilities and language barriers. Our biggest concern would be that our tenants no longer feel listened to and therefore have no desire to participate. Our team are committed to working together to ensure all our volunteers feel valued and are making a difference – why not give it a try!

If you would like more information on any of the above or to get more involved in decision making, please contact the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team on TVAET@wigan.gov.uk

The current structures for tenant engagement are detailed below. These structures reflect the needs and aspirations of tenants as well as fit the requirements of the business.

We have many ways to get involved either to help shape the services you receive as a tenant or to support the wider community in enhancing your neighbourhood and the lives of the people that live there. No matter how much or little time you can spare we have an opportunity to suit everyone.



Get Involved - Armchair Volunteers

Volunteer opportunities you can do from the comfort of your own home.

Surveys: Sign up to receive the latest surveys looking at housing services and other related topics.

Newsletter: Receive the latest Tenant Voice and Engagement Newsletter by email to find out what's happening across the Homes and Communities service and in your local neighbourhood.

Feedback and suggestions: Let us know about your experiences when contacting our services. Feedback will be used to improve the services you receive. If you've got a great idea, let us know!

Virtual Voice: Join one of our virtual meetings that look at specific topics to find out more about what's going on and to tell us your views.

Mystery shopper: Mystery shoppers allow tenants to monitor and appraise the services they receive. Tenants will feedback on services, stating what we do well and how we could improve via a feedback form. Training will be provided.

Readers Panel: This is a group of tenants that proofread letters, documents and flyers etc to ensure they are in plain English, easily understood, and in the right tone. All documents then receive the panels stamp of approval.

Better Connected Fund Panel member: A chance to read the latest applications for the Better-Connected Community Fund. Help to assess if they meet the criteria, improve community spirit, or our communities. You have the opportunity to approve, decline or question these requests.



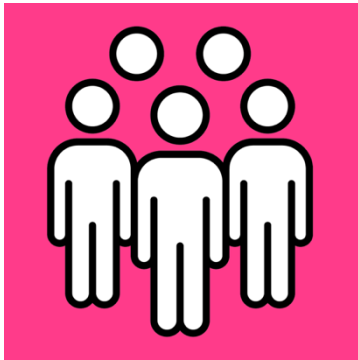
Housing Advisory Panel and Housing Scrutineer roles

Do you have more spare time to share? Want to make a real difference? The Housing Advisory Panel and Housing Scrutineer roles look at the strategic policies and procedures of the council. Participating in either role gives you the opportunity to share tenants' views in shaping and influencing housing services and ensure tenants are a part of the decisions we make.

Housing Advisory Panel: The panel is made up of tenants, councillors and council staff. The role of the tenant members is to provide challenge, leadership and support whilst sharing knowledge from wider tenant voice and lived experience.

Housing Scrutineer: As a housing scrutineer you will get the opportunity to look at how we work and take part in an in-depth review of our services. Ask questions and deep dive into how things work. You will then report back any findings and make recommendations for service improvements.

If you would like more information on any of the above or to get more involved in decision making, please contact the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team on 01942 486645 or TVAET@wigan.gov.uk



Already an active member in your community?

Tenant and Resident Association (TRA):

A TRA brings local people together to form a collective voice in the community in which they live. They work collaboratively with the council and wider groups to improve their neighbourhood, solve local issues, and improve community spirit.

Neighbourhood Champion:

Where no tenants and residents' group exist, the role of neighbourhood champion will be promoted. This role provides that link between tenants and the council and will be a local point of contact.

Tenant Voice – Neighbourhood Champions Group:

The tenant voice group aims to bring the neighbourhood champions from across the borough together to discuss wider concerns, relay important information and be a sounding board to discuss changes in services. It helps us to shape policies and highlight issues to pass to the Housing Advisory Board.

Tenant Voice – Eyes & Ears Group:

The role of the eyes and ears group is to give a platform for individual tenants to come together and share their views on local issues that affect our housing areas. Raising issues and working together to create solutions.

Youth Voice Champions (new):

Our champion role is for any young person (11-18) living in a council property. This is an opportunity to share views and to make informed decisions on issues that affect them, their homes, and their local communities. Helping us to shape the services of the future.

Holding events to bring your community together:

Any tenant interested in holding an event or training to bring the community together, improve the places and spaces or increase tenant voice can contact the Tenant Voice and Engagement team for support and to find out more.

If you would like more information on any of the above, please contact the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team on 01924 486645 or email TVAET@wigan.gov.uk



Living in our sheltered accommodation (in addition to the other opportunities)

Sheltered Voice: (New)

The Sheltered Voice Group brings together representatives from across all the sheltered schemes to discuss wider issues affecting residents, utilising their collective voice to influence service changes and share best practice on improving engagement and ensuring all residents have a voice.

Sheltered Forum:

Join the Sheltered and Tenant Voice and Engagement Team bi-annually to come together with other sheltered residents. Get the latest news and updates, catch up with old friends and let us know how the services are working for you



Living in our High-Rise buildings (in addition to the wider opportunities)

High Rise Champions:

Where no Tenants and Residents group exists the role of high-rise champion will be promoted. This role provides that link between tenants and the council and will be a local point of contact.

High Rise Panel:

is a group of tenants that proofread letters, documents, flyers etc to ensure they are in plain English, easily understood, and written in the right tone, specifically around the health and fire safety of the buildings.

The Role of the Tenant Voice and Engagement Team

The Tenant Voice and Engagement Team are available to support individual tenants, tenant groups and wider community groups, as well as wider council staff and partners, encouraging engagement with housing services and local communities. The team will take responsibility for the work outlined in this strategy and will promote the tenant voice in all arenas.

The Tenant Voice and Engagement Officers can support with:

- Encouragement and support for tenants to participate
- Facilitating focus groups, small surveys, creating survey tools and templates and co-ordinating consultations
- Ensuring feedback from focus groups and consultations are shared with participants and used to shape our services
- Providing advice to staff and tenants on undertaking tenant engagement
- Planning community events involving tenants including 'pop up' events, consultations and focus groups

- Maintaining and refreshing the tenant engagement database, including an annual check in that the tenant wishes to remain in the database, how they would like to get involved and the impact they make

Alongside the volunteer opportunities that the team support we also engage within local communities to provide a visible presence and build relationships. To find out who your local Tenant Voice and Engagement Officer is, or to get more involved please contact the team.

Volunteer Support

The team will support any tenants wishing to get involved, we will help to find solutions for any barriers that may prevent our tenants from having a voice. We will work with tenants to provide training and will regularly contact our volunteers to ensure they feel like they are being heard, listened to, and making a difference.

Funding

The team can advise on funding through the better-connected community fund that offers up to £2000 to improve community spirit, the spaces that matter to communities, training, and tenant voice. We also support TRA's through our annual grant. The team can also support with external funding applications and collaborative working.

www.wigan.gov.uk/TenantVoice

Setting up a local TRA

Need support on setting up a new group? The team can support with practical advice on setting up a committee, opening a bank account, applying for funding and all other advice that required.

Community Cuppa

Join the team in your local area to have a brew and find out more about what is happening locally. Find out how you can get involved or tell us your views.

Talk and Tidy Tuesdays

These are held the last Tuesday of the month from March to October. The team, work alongside our caretakers, Neighbourhood Tenant Officers, and wider council staff to hold pop up events across the borough. We look at cleaning up the area, talking to the tenants about issues and getting involved with estate walkabouts and litter picks.

Estate Inspections

Estate inspections enable tenants who live on our estates to join Wigan Council staff in appraising their neighbourhood, noticing concerns and issues, and addressing environmental problems. Estate inspection dates and times will be published on our website.

Training

Training is important as a tool to help tenants and staff make informed views or decisions. The environment we work in, and our customer expectations are constantly changing and subsequently training for tenants and staff should be part of an ongoing process of review.

- To initially conduct a training needs analysis of all tenant participation staff and tenants' groups
- To draw up a comprehensive training programme for tenant participation staff and tenants' groups
- To put together induction and refresher training programmes for individual tenant volunteers and groups
- To monitor effectiveness and satisfaction with training
- To continually monitor and adjust our training plan to new needs and opportunities

Links to the wider community

Wigan Council cannot achieve everything set out in this strategy in isolation. A joined-up approach is needed and this strategy links in with and supports other strategies such as Wigan Borough's Housing Strategy, The Deal 2030 Council Strategy incorporating the latest updates through Progress with Unity (a new era), Youth Participation Strategy and the Equality and Diversity Strategy.

Additionally, we will continue to collaborate with our local communities, tenant and residents' groups, other partners and agencies in a co-ordinated way to meet the needs of our tenants. We promise to work together to:

- Build stronger links with the local partner organisations. Offering support in translating the communities needs and aspirations, contributing to more connected communities
- Strengthen links with Township Managers and co-ordinate activity for the benefit of local communities
- Strengthen links with local community, tenant, resident groups, and community champions

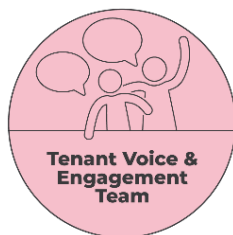
What:	How:
Strengthening and improving current tenant engagement structures to enable increased participation.	• Actively promote our engagement opportunities • Work together to remove barriers to getting involved • Be more visible in our communities to be able to promote tenant engagement. • Create new volunteer opportunities from listening to your feedback
To actively promote opportunities for tenant participation internally to housing staff and externally to tenants, councillors, and our partners.	• Newsletters • Social media • Wigan Council website • Events and meetings • Community noticeboards • Staff meetings and internal training to embed tenant engagement in all housing roles
Ensuring all tenants and housing staff have access to relevant training about voice and engagement and understand the benefits.	• Provide and promote relevant training opportunities • Offer tailored training for each volunteer role. • Provide 1:1 support and advice to ensure volunteers feel valued and listened too.
Encourage input from all tenants in the co-design and delivery of maintenance and improvement works in their area.	• Focus groups • Consultations • Surveys • Feedback from complaints and website
Raising awareness of equal opportunity issues and adopting a targeted approach in consulting hard to reach groups, actively removing barriers to participate.	• Create volunteer opportunities to suit all requirements, removing barriers to participation • Identify underrepresented groups and actively promote opportunities to ensure we get the views of all our tenants. • Work together with our tenants to identify new ways to engage with a wider audience
Ensuring there are adequate consultation processes in place, which are constantly reviewed, and that tenants' rights to consultation,	• Review our consultation processes on a regular basis. • Offer various ways to be consulted – Surveys, consultation events, focus groups, website etc.

information and devolved powers, are made known to tenants and leaseholders.	• Ensure we consult our tenants on subjects that can impact their lives, homes, and community. • Advertise any consultations in a variety of ways to reach all tenants that would be affected by the change. • Ensure all tenant rights are publicised, easy to find and understand.
Strengthening links with the wider community by supporting corporate and community wide strategies	• Work together with tenants, tenant and residents' groups and wider community groups to improve the places and spaces that mean the most to them • Work with wider Wigan Council teams and partner organisations to strive for a cleaner, greener, safer, and inclusive borough • Promote funding opportunities through our Better-connected community fund
Constantly monitoring, reviewing, and refreshing this strategy.	• Regularly seek feedback to ensure all points raised within this strategy remain relevant and worthwhile, work together to refresh, and bring new ideas on how to engage better
Ensuring feedback from surveys, consultations and service agreements are given in a timely manner, which are easily understood and openly publicised.	• Produce an annual report on our performance, showing clearly how we perform against current government standards • Demonstrate how tenants have shaped services through our tenant engagement opportunities • Work with our readers panel to ensure all documents, letters, website etc are plain English, jargon free and easy to understand • Using feedback from tenants to improve services and continually review our policies and processes.

For more information or to contact the team:

Tenant Voice And Engagement Team - TVAET@wigan.gov.uk

or 01942 486645.



Visit our Webpages: www.wigan.gov.uk/TenantVoice