

Tenant Involvement Strategy 2023-2027



HOMES FIRST

Lewes and Eastbourne
Councils
working together for you

Joint Foreword

Joint foreword by Cllr William Meyer, Cllr Alan Shuttleworth and Roger Eastwood, Eastbourne Homes Ltd. Chair

This is the first refresh of our Tenant Involvement Strategy following the wholesale review back in 2018.

We are pleased to note that the aims agreed with tenants five years ago have stood the test of time and are still meaningful to our engaged tenants who have helped us refresh this strategy.

We feel that this strategy provides us with the principles and flexibility to respond positively to the expectations of proactive consumer regulation being developed as part of the future direction of Social Housing Regulation. This strategy enables us to respond to the changes to regulation which place an emphasis on the importance of tenants being listened to and being able to hold their landlord to account.

We would like to recognise the work of all tenants that have been part of delivering our initial strategy for their commitment and time given to supporting Homes First develop and improve the services delivered. We also thank them for helping to shape the future direction of our tenant engagement opportunities and look forward to working with them to ensure that this strategy remains fit for purpose in this changing and challenging environment for social housing.

This Strategy formally reinforces our commitment to involving tenants in shaping the services that Homes First provides.



Cllr William Meyer



Cllr Alan Shuttleworth



Roger Eastwood
Chair, Eastbourne Homes Ltd



Introduction

This strategy will enable our tenants and our staff to respond positively to:

The new **Social Housing Regulatory Framework** and ensure that we are prepared for proactive regulation and in-depth assessment.

- The **Charter for Social Housing Residents** we will use the seven commitments within the Charter for Social Housing to provide a clear framework for our approach to ensure tenants:
- **Voices are heard and are treated with respect.**
- **Are safe in their homes.**
- **Know how we are performing.**
- **Have complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.**
- **Have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live.**

We have refreshed our tenant involvement strategy, recognising that:

- The principles outlined in our first joint tenant involvement strategy remain relevant to our approach to engaging with tenants.
- The detailed work plan will evolve over the lifetime this strategy.
- An annual review of the strategy will be undertaken with involved tenants to ensure that the aims and the principles are in line with the expectations of tenants, the Regulator of Social Housing and best practice.

Through our first joint Tenant Involvement Strategy, we:

- Achieved 22 out of 27 objectives including establishing a new framework of involvement across Lewes and Eastbourne. Outstanding objectives will be rolled over to this current Strategy.
- Supported tenants to remain engaged throughout the Covid-19 pandemic including providing IT training and equipment to enable many tenants to join meetings virtually.
- Established and grew our Virtual 300 group, which now stands at 145 (87 members from Lewes and 58 members from Eastbourne).
- Set up and trained a committed group of scrutineers who have undertaken 3 in-depth, detailed reviews into:
 - Communal repairs.
 - Complaints handling.
 - Rent arrears.
- Ran two successful face to face tenants conferences.
- Achieved 'substantial assurance' through internal audit of progress made implementing the strategy, with no recommendations for improvement
- Delivered training on housing finance and the housing revenue account, empowering tenants to engage in useful dialogue with councillors and officers.
- Invested in our approach to tenant engagement through our quarterly STAR survey and a range of regular 'transactional surveys' such as repairs, complaints, major works and new lettings.
- Extended TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) membership to staff and tenants in both Lewes and Eastbourne.
- Actively participated in a range of National Federation of ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organisation) groups, including tenant engagement, complaints, data management and asset management.
- Piloted innovative engagement approaches including the use of 'common place', an online engagement platform used in the development of a community improvement plan with a range of partners.
- Worked with residents to invest over £100,000 through the community improvement funds and established a ring-fenced budget for retirement housing tenants.

- Undertook an extensive review of Retirement Housing, including 2 phases of consultation at each retirement scheme in both Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough.
- Delivered 10 pop-up events across Lewes and Eastbourne in 2022-23, engaging tenants 'on their door steps' on issues that matter to them and supported a range of community events.
- Developed and delivered a range of tenant publications including our joint newsletter, Tenants Open Voice, Annual Reports, Covid-19 newsletters, Community Living Well (cost of living resource)
- Developed and delivered a quarterly Tenant Involvement Update for staff.



Stronger Together – Vision & Values

Lewes & Eastbourne have joined forces to deliver outstanding customer service and provide our communities with a great place to live, work and enjoy.

Our shared values are:

- **Customer Focus**
 - We care about our customers and understand their needs
 - We support our staff to help our customers
 - We listen to customer feedback and act on it
- **Achievement Focus**
 - We are proud of our staff and the services we provide
 - We deliver what we promise
 - We set ourselves clear targets and achieve great outcomes:

This strategy will build on the strong foundations of our key achievements over the last 4 years.

Scope

Lewes & Eastbourne Council's & Eastbourne Homes Ltd., hereafter referred to as 'Homes First' recognise the critical role tenants play in ensuring that we deliver effective, efficient and accessible services to all our tenants. Tenant involvement is central to achieving outcomes which ensure our communities thrive.

Within the context of this strategy, we use the term 'tenants' in its broadest legal sense to include tenants, leaseholders and any additional tenures of Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council. When we refer to 'communities', we include residents in other tenures in neighbourhoods where tenants reside.



What do we mean by Tenant Involvement?

In terms of Tenant Involvement, we mean:

- How we find out what tenants and communities want and need.
- The ways that tenants can get involved, if they want to.
- The ways in which we support and empower tenants to influence and improve our services.

By working together, tenants and staff can:

- Create an environment where tenants can help shape and improve our services. We want to work with tenants in genuine partnership.
- Develop meaningful involvement opportunities which produce useful feedback that we can act on.
- Make sure our approach to involvement leads to improvement and positive change for tenants, communities and Homes First.

We have reviewed our previous key aims for our strategy with tenants and refreshed them to ensure that we continue to deliver relevant involvement which makes a difference to tenants and Homes Firsts' services:

- 1. Develop a consistent involvement offer across Lewes & Eastbourne, that is responsive to the different social geography profile of each area and which respects the different governance structures. An involvement offer that provides a wide range of involvement opportunities which give tenants influence over local and strategic decision-making.** We know that tenant involvement is most successful when it is planned around the lives and interests of tenants. We want to encourage as many tenants as possible to have their say, become engaged and participate in our business. We will ensure that there are ways for tenants to influence the things that matter to them, including opportunities which work best for our communities.

To do this, we will:

- Review the involvement structure introduced in 2019 to ensure that it continues to support wider involvement and promotes opportunities for tenants to challenge and scrutinise our services.
- Involve tenants in setting standards, performance indicators and targets and report on both good and bad performance.
- Develop the performance monitoring role of tenants by providing them with accurate performance data so that they can effectively review services and challenge poor performance.
- Support TRAs and Area Panels to widen their engagement and communication channels they use within the community.
- Enable and support TRA's and Area Panels to develop local involvement opportunities to meet local community needs
- Work collaboratively and in partnership with other Council teams and local organisations to broaden engagement opportunities.

2. Demonstrate the outcomes and value for money of involvement

Putting tenants at the heart of all that we do, we will support and empower tenants to play a lead role in checking how we perform, challenging us to improve, and holding us to account if we fail to do so.

To do this, we will continue to develop and refine:

- Our methods for capturing outcomes from and impact of all our involvement activities, enabling us to demonstrate the value of involvement.
- Routes for feedback on actions and identify what difference has been made as a result of involvement.
- How we assess the impact of all our involvement activities in collaboration with tenants and report back on the difference involvement has made.
- Opportunities for tenants to assess the overall value for money of services through tenant-led scrutiny.

3. Increase involvement and use of what tenants tell us to drive service improvements

We know that some tenants don't get involved because they don't believe that we will listen and act on what they tell us. We will aim to develop a 'you said, we did' approach that will help tenants and staff to see where feedback has made a difference to the way we do things.

To do this, we will:

- Maximise the use of our tenant feedback data to inform service and policy reviews.
- Make our involvement opportunities more accessible to our diverse tenants and communities ensuring that tenants can have a say without having to travel miles or commit lots of time.
- Continue to develop the role and importance of tenant Involvement and engagement across all of Homes First and related Council services.

4. Make better use of technology for involvement

We know that tenants have busy lives and we want to use modern technology to make it as easy as possible for tenants to contribute.

To do this, we will:

- Continue to develop the use of modern technology to give as many tenants as possible the chance to share and express their views, contributing to shaping and improving services.
- Refresh our database of involved tenants to support consultation and involvement activities.
- Continue to develop our approach to promoting, measuring and reporting the impact of involvement through the use of specialist software.

5. Provide training, capacity building and other support for both tenants and staff

We want to work with tenants and staff to create the very best opportunities for tenants to truly influence the decisions which impact on their lives.

To do this, we will:

- Ensure that staff are aware of the role of involvement, are skilled in delivering effective involvement and supported to achieve clear performance targets
- Offer training, learning and support to all involved tenants to develop the skills and confidence to be effective in their involvement
- Maximize our networking and benchmarking opportunities to share best practice with our tenants, partners and colleagues with a view to developing our involvement and housing service offer



Involvement Delivery Model

Homes First remain committed to offering practical solutions to make tenant involvement a viable option for as many tenants as possible. We established a “Menu of Involvement” for tenants to influence decisions at whatever level suits their lifestyle. We will continue to pilot these options on a demand-led basis. This means that we will regularly review our involvement methods and refresh the model. **Only involvement methods which are both popular with tenants and delivering outcomes for tenants and Homes First will be supported on an on-going basis.**

The full menu of involvement, explanatory notes and model can be found in **Appendix 1**.

What Next?

Over the life of this strategy, we will:

- Review this structure including all support documentation (terms of reference, codes of conduct etc.) and provide the support and resources required to ensure involvement effectively delivers the aims of this strategy.
- Continue to promote involvement and effectively recruit to increase the numbers and broaden the diversity of those tenants who are involved.
- Assess the impact of our involvement activities and review the methods of involvement on an annual basis.
- Focus our time and resources on the most popular and effective and on developing new involvement opportunities to replace those which do not work.

Support & Resources

We will ensure that tenant Involvement is part of Homes First’s core business. There will be a resource commitment and we will review the resources, skills and expertise to ensure our approach is effective. This will help support our objectives and provide a consistent approach across Homes First.

To make sure that support and resources are available for effective involvement, we will:

- Develop a clear expenses, incentives and rewards policy for involvement.
- Provide/arrange transport to and from venues for involvement activities, if tenants are unable to do so.
- Ensure venues are accessible to all, and meet the needs of all tenants, taking account of diversity.
- Vary times and locations of involvement activities to ensure that all tenants have access to involvement, including evenings and weekends.
- Provide the appropriate staff to support involvement activities.
- Provide dedicated financial resources and equipment to support involvement
- Ensure that appropriate independent advice is available to individuals and groups if they require it
- Assess the training and support needs of individuals and groups and provide the necessary resources to meet need.

Involvement for All

We will ensure that we continue to be inclusive and representative. We want all tenants to be involved regardless of age, disability, marriage or civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and will provide the support needed to enable this.

Our approach to tenant involvement is committed to equality of opportunity for all and to respect the needs of our diverse communities. This is in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and expectations set out within the proposed Social Housing Regulatory Consumer Standards

What will Involvement look like in 2027 as a result of this strategy?

Tenant Involvement at Homes First will be excellent, because it will:

- Be a key part of all our service reviews, highlighting options for getting involved and the support available to tenants from staff.
- Develop new and innovative involvement methods (see appendix 1), which really work and deliver improvements and positive change for both tenants and Homes First.
- Make better use of the things our customers tell us and enable as many tenants as possible to contribute their views and influence our services.

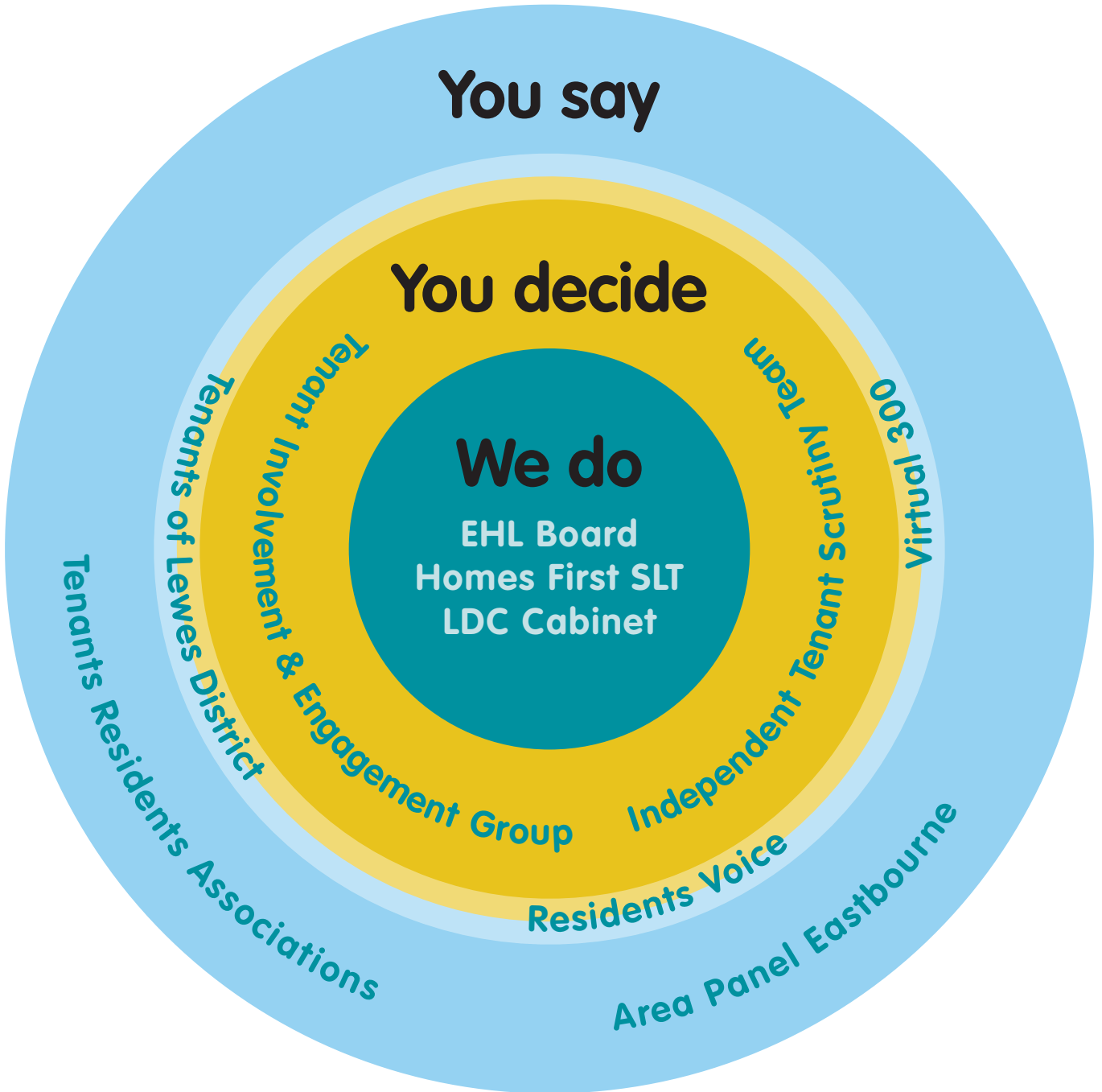
- Improve communication to tenants and staff about what our tenants have told us and what we have done as a result to improve our services.
- Be clear what we want to achieve from all involvement activities, allowing everyone to clearly see the value of involving tenants in all that we do.
- Provide and/or sign-post training and support to tenants that will enable them to be involved in improving communities, neighbourhoods and homes
- Include honesty and transparency, being clear whether discussions are about informing, consulting or empowering tenants to make decisions.
- Work with tenants and staff to identify when and how tenants can be involved in service actions and improvements identified in our service development plans.
- Have an increasing and more diverse group of involved tenants

Monitoring/accountability

Progress against the strategic action plan **appendix 2** will be monitored by tenants and we will ensure that the committees of both TOLD (Lewes) and Residents Voice (Eastbourne) are actively involved. We will produce regular updates and progress against the plan will be provided to Eastbourne Homes Board and publicised to all tenants in the annual tenant's report.



Wheel of Involvement



Toolbox Activities

- Mystery Shopping
- Working Groups
- Chat Café
- Quality Checkers
- VITAL
- Equality Groups
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Focus Groups
- Walkabouts
- Annual Tenants Day
- Training
- Armchair Advisors*

* Email, Text, Online

Formal Ways For Tenants To Get Involved

Board Membership - Eastbourne Homes Limited (EHL) provides housing management and property services to EBC tenants and is led by a Board of Directors, three of whom are tenants.

Spends & Saves - Trained tenants will be involved in the tender processes, looking at contract requirements, selecting contractors and monitoring contract delivery

LDC tenants attend Cabinet - Two tenants are elected by TOLD (see below) to attend LDC's Cabinet. They are not voting members but are invited to comment on any tenant related issues.

Residents Voice - Residents Voice represents the views of tenants from across Eastbourne Borough. The meetings cover topical housing issues with guest monitor / improve Homes First service performance in Eastbourne Borough. Residents Voice also oversees the Community Improvement budget.

Tenants Organisation of Lewes District (TOLD)
- TOLD represents the views of tenants from across Lewes District. The meetings cover topical housing issues with guest speakers; ratify the work of the TOLD Committee, which monitors Homes First service performance in Lewes District. TOLD also manages the Community Improvement budget.

Tenant Scrutiny Team - Tenant-led scrutiny reviews are overseen by the TIE group, who commission trained tenants to carry out in-depth service reviews. The scrutiny team makes evidence-based recommendations based on which the Homes First Senior Leadership Team will produce an improvement plan which is monitored by the TIE group

Tenants Involvement and Empowerment (TIE) Panel – following feedback from involved tenants we will review the approach to TIE to ensure that there is strategic oversight of this strategy and that tenants are meaningfully involved in service and policy developments

Service Improvement Groups (SIGs) - consider services covered by Homes England's Regulatory Framework Consumer Standards.

Leasehold Panel – an independent Panel representing the interests of leaseholders.

Tenants and Residents Associations/Area Panels
– a great way to get together to discuss issues in your area. We can help with running costs and activities we can also attend meetings.

Retirement Housing Forum - to discuss the views and specific needs of retirement housing tenants

Informal Ways For Tenants To Get Involved

(we will explore the following options where appropriate and when required)

Report it - provide feedback via the 'Report It' app, a quick and easy way to report environmental problems to the councils when you are out and about – take you can report the problem, give the location and include a photo. Your report then goes straight through to the right team to deal with the issue.

Chat Café - Occasionally, we will ask residents to join us at a local community café or other local venue for a cuppa and a chat on the issues that matter most to them.

Surveys/Questionnaires - to ask you what you think of your housing service. You can receive surveys by post, text, email or telephone

Community Pop Ups – periodically we will join forces with colleagues from Neighbourhood Housing / Neighbourhood First and other partners to attend a pop event at a location to discuss an issue – we have run pop ups around consultations on bin stores / community gardens

Focus Groups - one-off informal but structured chat with other Tenants to give your views on a specific area of service such as repairs.

Youth Voice - Specific consultations and events for tenants and license holders aged 16-25 not just tenants and licence holders; but young people living in our households.

Virtual 300 - Share your views and ideas via email communications the web and social media, giving comments or compliments, engaging in an online discussion forum or joining a virtual community looking at a specific topic.






































Annual Tenants Day - A Homes First annual event (a conference, community event or door step consultation) to inform tenants of new initiatives, gain tenants views on existing services and changes they would like and to identify customer priorities.

Communications Panel / Armchair advisors - This Panel ensures that communications to the public easy to understand and jargon free for tenants using feedback from Armchair Advisers who review draft communications from the comfort of their homes.













E&D Voice –Specific consultations and events where services may have a different impact because of a person's age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.











Mystery Shopping - trained tenants who test our services to make sure they are delivering services in line with agreed standards and whether those standards are appropriate.

Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan


















Aim one - Develop a consistent involvement offer across Lewes & Eastbourne, that respects the different governance structures and offers a wide range of involvement opportunities	Complies with Tenant Involvement Strategic Aim	Year 1 by Apr 2024	Year 2 by Apr 2025	Year 3 by Apr 2026	Year 4 by Apr 2027
Agree capacity for ongoing Tenant Involvement work					
Support the continued development of the Retirement Housing Forum through training, supporting the retirement service plan improvements and community improvement budget					
Agree and review with tenants, resources for the Tenant Involvement Service and capital and revenue budgets for tenant's groups					
Agree with tenants and staff priorities for community improvement expenditure					
Develop service standards (our local offer to tenants) and Performance Information for Tenant Involvement					
Agree a position statement with tenants involved at a strategic level against the aims within this strategy to enable tenants to actively review progress through the lifetime of this strategy	Also aim 2				
Working with current Involved tenants to develop a revised approach to oversee this involvement strategy and to ensure tenant involvement opportunities in service delivery are maximised					
Review Terms of Reference / approach for joint scrutiny team, and undertake recruitment and training	Also aim 5				
Develop options for an annual tenant event to be considered by tenants					
Consider diversity of involvement and feedback, compared to the profile of our tenants and agree steps to redress any imbalance if necessary	Also aim 3				
Keep under review roles and terms of reference of Residents Voice/TOLD/Area Panels/TRAs, as necessary					
Work with Tenants and Residents Associations /Area Panels where there is demand to develop communication and engagement plans to promote their work					
Review the content of the current newsletter Tenant's Open Voice with residents, and consider cost effective delivery options for publications such as, the newsletter, annual report and impact assessment	Also aim 2				









Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan

Aim two - Demonstrate the outcomes and value for money of involvement	Complies with Tenant Involvement Strategic Aim	Year 1 by Apr 2024	Year 2 by Apr 2025	Year 3 by Apr 2026	Year 4 by Apr 2027
To review how strategic groups ensure Value For Money is considered and reported on					
To review how strategic groups ensure Value For Money is considered and reported on					
Annually Consult with formal tenant's groups on possible new involvement options from the "Menu of Options" – deliver and review options with tenants	Also aim 3				
To undertake at least one scrutiny review per annum	Also aim 5				

Aim three - Increase involvement and use of what tenants tell us to drive service improvements	Complies with Tenant Involvement Strategic Aim	Year 1 by Apr 2024	Year 2 by Apr 2025	Year 3 by Apr 2026	Year 4 by Apr 2027
Annually agree with staff and tenants how to effectively involve tenants to support delivery of the Homes First service improvement programme demonstrating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That tenants are being listened to • Fairness and respect Opportunities to influence the services tenants receive	Also aim 1				
Develop a Customer Service Promise for Homes First with tenants					
Ensure that equalities information is updated on the Tenancy Management IT system such that it can inform tenant involvement activity					
Develop a clear offer of support for involved residents along with an expenses, incentives and rewards policy for involvement	Also aim 5				

Tenant Involvement Strategy Action Plan

Aim four - Make better use of technology for involvement	Complies with Tenant Involvement Strategic Aim	Year 1 by Apr 2024	Year 2 by Apr 2025	Year 3 by Apr 2026	Year 4 by Apr 2027
Continue to develop online options for tenant involvement and make better use of social media to increase engagement and to promote the achievements of involved tenants	Also aim 1				
Using feedback data to support neighbourhood profiling / customer segmentation – to help inform engagement opportunities	Also aim 1				
Review with tenants the Tenant Involvement strategy development and action plan annually in line with the Regulator of Social Housing expectations and best practice	Also aim 2				
Develop a data management framework – shared with tenants demonstrating where policy and service improvements are data led					
Develop a clear programme of consultations using the V300 – promote achievements and grow membership					

Aim five - Provide training, capacity building and other support for both tenants and staff	Complies with Tenant Involvement Strategic Aim	Year 1 by Apr 2024	Year 2 by Apr 2025	Year 3 by Apr 2026	Year 4 by Apr 2027
Develop with tenants a suite of training programmes for tenants and deliver a range of training opportunities over the lifetime of this strategy	Also aim 3				
Provide training for Housing First staff on Tenant Involvement and promote awareness of tenant involvement opportunities to ensure that Tenant Involvement is integral to all staff roles.	Also aim 1				
Develop protocol and support to enable tenant groups to access external funding where appropriate and in response to residents requirements				