



**WestKent**

Places to live. Space to grow.



# Resident Engagement Strategy



How we will create a partnership with our residents

**2021-2023**

# Strategy overview and vision

This strategy builds on the work of the previous one. It will ensure a wide range of opportunities for residents to be involved in whatever capacity they would wish to be. We will provide opportunities for residents that want to reply to an occasional survey to those that have more time and want to hold us to account or codesign services with us.

West Kent has always put residents at the heart of its decision making. It leads from the top with places on its board for residents and a board champion for resident engagement.

This strategy also looks to break down barriers. We want to ensure the widest numbers of our residents are given opportunities to engage. We want the profile of our involved residents to align with the profile of our resident population. We are presently underrepresented in a number of areas, most noticeably residents with disabilities and BAME residents and we want to remedy that.

This strategy is being adopted while the world is still in the middle of a covid pandemic. The new ways of working that have evolved as a result have already seen positive changes to the way that we engage with residents online. We will build on this work, and work closely with the communities team to increase the numbers of our residents that are digitally proficient, to reach wider numbers of residents that cannot or choose not to engage face to face. We will, however, provide face to face opportunities, as soon as these are possible, because we recognise that many of our residents prefer this.

Throughout this strategy we refer to 'residents'. 'Resident' refers to anyone that lives in a West Kent home regardless of tenure. Where there is a need to be more specific, a 'tenant' is someone who lives in one of our rented homes (and not just the person on the rent account), a 'leaseholder' will be a homeowner of a home where West Kent is the freeholder of the block and a 'shared owner' will be anyone that shares the ownership of their home with West Kent on a part own/part rent basis, regardless of share.



## Our vision is:

- To increase the number of residents that engage with us on resident engagement activities each year
- To increase the quality of the feedback that we receive from residents by ensuring that we engage with them on topics they want to discuss and plan engaging content for sessions
- To learn to listen, not just to confirm what we think, but to learn
- To involve residents in the production of key customer focussed policies, strategies and service standards
- To reflect our resident population in the demographic of those that are involved with us
- To raise the profile of resident involvement internally and externally so that everyone is aware of the benefits and outcomes
- To increase resident satisfaction in the annual STAR survey
- To prove to residents that their voice counts

## The National Context

Resident involvement remains a priority at West Kent because the Board and the Senior Leadership team recognise the benefits, practical and financial, of engaging with the resident voice early and regularly. Resident engagement informs better decision making and ensures fewer mistakes are made when developing plans, policies and services.

There are, however, also three key national requirements that we must ensure are met through the delivery of this strategy. These are detailed as appendix 2.



# Our approach

## Objective 1

**Our resident involvement framework will ensure that no customer facing policy is implemented without resident engagement**

- We will develop and promote a mechanism for residents to suggest topics for the scrutiny panel or consultation generally
- We will offer a programme of events that enables residents to engage with us as they wish, both digital and face to face, across Kent, at different times of the day and week
- Our programme of consultation will enable residents to give their views depending on their preferences, their abilities and the time they have available.

## Objective 2

**Our involved residents will have the skills to enable them to carry out their roles effectively**

- Residents will be offered training to understand the business and the sector
- A range of training opportunities will be offered to all residents that are on panels, ad hoc training will be offered more widely
- We will explore mentoring opportunities for our residents.

## Objective 3

**We will seek our residents' views on matters of sector debate**

- We will regularly communicate to our residents to ensure they understand the national issues that affect them and are aware of West Kent's responsibilities in the white paper, under the Building Safety Bill and the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- We will support the work of Tpas, PlaceShapers and the National Housing Federation and take any opportunities that are offered to involve our residents in their consultations
- We will sign up to the NHF's Together with Tenants initiative and work with the scrutiny panel to tailor their charter and enable it to be adopted by Board
- We will have specific plans for ensuring that residents are driving the response to plans for building regulations and fire safety at Tennyson Lodge, Brook and Templar.

## Objective 4

**Our resident involvement framework will be flexible, and feedback will not rely solely on our panels**

- We will form a fully functioning scrutiny panel that is resident-led and integrated into our decision-making processes
- We will plan a programme of online and face to face events (when allowed) as well as using questionnaires and our online Facebook Group to get views
- We will recruit residents to all our contractor core groups
- We will create a Neighbourhood News editorial panel

## Our approach

### Objective 5

**The entire organisation is committed to resident involvement and all staff will work towards ensuring that no new customer facing policy is implemented without resident engagement**

- Residents will help us to determine what strategies and policies are key
- We will identify resident involvement 'champions' in each area of the business who will support the communications and engagement team to deliver the strategy
- We will get to a position by the end of the strategy period where no new externally facing policy, procedure or initiative is implemented without residents being involved in its creation.

### Objective 6

**We recognise that our shared owners and leaseholders have different issues to tenants and will use a different approach to engage with them**

- We will develop a shared ownership panel and agree with its members a programme of discussion, frequency and format of meetings
- We will research the need and appetite for a leaseholder panel
- We will work with the Head of Home Ownership to improve the feedback questionnaire currently used on completion of sales and use the feedback we receive to improve our services and the specification of any new developments.

## What will success look like and how will we measure it?

### We will use the following measures to track the impact of this strategy:

These indicators will help us track the reach of our engagement activities and whether we are meeting our aim of representing our tenant population

- Breakdown of involved residents by age, gender and ethnicity against our tenant profile
- Number of individual residents involved
- Breakdown of involved residents by geographical location and tenure type

These measures will help us understand the impact of our activities and whether our residents are satisfied with our approach

### Perception: Annual Measure (STAR survey)

- Satisfaction with listening to residents' views and taking notice (How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with opportunities given to you to participate in West Kent's decision-making processes?)

### Transactional: Ongoing (in month) as activities delivered

- Resident Voice (How satisfied are you that the events you have recently taken part in will influence how West Kent works?)
- Resident satisfaction of training provided
- Feedback surveys for all resident involvement activity

### We expect that the successful delivery of this strategy will also positively impact on:

- Numbers of complaints that reach the second stage
- Overall customer satisfaction as measured through the STAR Survey (Taking everything into account, how satisfied are you with the service provided by West Kent?)

## How we will share findings

We will ensure the voice of our residents is heard throughout the business, raise the profile of resident involvement activity and the impact of resident involvement on the services that we provide by doing the following:

- We will create an area on the website called 'You said we did' that we keep up to date with all outcomes of resident involvement
- We will report key headlines to Board at least quarterly

- We will publish updates in Neighbourhood News and also feature stories from our involved residents
- We will post regularly on social media to drive traffic to our website to find information
- We will follow up all major consultations with a report and send to participants, Senior Leadership team and Board and post on website
- Produce an annual report of all resident involvement activity in collaboration with our scrutiny panel.

## Appendix 1

The Resident Engagement strategy will link to:

- **Our Strategic Plan**

Effective resident engagement will support the delivery of all four of our key objectives.

- **Communications and Marketing strategy (will be updated in 2021)**

Communications and resident engagement are closely linked at West Kent. We will use all of our communications channels to maximise the numbers of residents that engage with us and feedback the outcomes of any resident engagement activity. We will continue to promote the benefits of resident engagement to both the organisation and to anyone living in our homes or communities.

- **Customer Experience Strategy**

The customer experience strategy also commits to put resident voice at the heart of decision making. Its aims of achieving positive feedback in resident voice perception and transactional surveys and the demonstrable link between resident feedback and West Kent's priorities all link to those in this strategy.

- **Community Investment Strategy**

There are clear links between the work to build better communities and the aims of residents to improve the homes that form those communities.

We involve residents in our work to build better communities across Kent and want to share the positive impact that our homes and our residents can have on their local area.

- **Age – A Positive Experience**

15% of West Kent's lead residents are over 75, our engagement approach reflects the needs of that age group.

- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategic framework**

This framework aims to involve residents of all ages, from all across Kent and across a diverse range of people. We will look to ensure that our resident voice represents our resident population and not just those from one area, age group or ethnic background.

## Appendix 2

We must meet the requirements of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard which states that:

Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- a) the formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities
- b) the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- c) the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
- d) the management of their homes, where applicable
- e) the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
- f) agreeing local offers for service delivery

The **social housing white paper** was published in November 2020 and its recommendations provide the foundations for this strategy. We are expecting a greater focus from the regulator in the future, particularly around scrutiny and the need to evidence that we are not only undertaking involvement activities but that those activities are resident-led and that we can prove that we are co-creating services. Our work has already started to move in this direction and we will ensure that we are fully aware of our regulatory obligations as the detail emerges. There will be a lot to do but we have already begun that work.

Equally, at the end of 2019 the National Housing Federation (NHF) launched its **Together with Tenants** initiative. The NHF has established a four-point plan for change. As well as producing a new code of governance, that strengthens the role of residents to put them at the heart of decision-making, the NHF's ambition is for all housing associations to support their plan and consider adopting a **Together with Tenants charter**. They hope that this will embed a culture across our sector that values the voice and experience of residents and strengthens the relationship between residents and housing association landlords.

Working with our scrutiny panel we will develop our own charter, based on the Together with Tenants charter. After internal and external consultation we will bring that to Board to sign up to the Together with Tenants initiative and adopt the charter.

Finally, the government is bringing forward fundamental changes in the draft **Building Safety Bill** that will improve building and fire safety, so that people will be, and will feel, safer in their homes.

The government wants residents' safety to be a greater priority through the entire life cycle of a building – from design and construction, through to when people are living in their homes. We must find a way to give our residents a voice throughout and prevent another Grenfell tragedy.

Recently, Tpas, the national tenant participation body, of which we are a member, published its **National Tenant Engagement Standards**. Our strategy aims are broadly in line with their content, but we will use their self-assessment tool with residents to identify any gaps.

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