



Places to live. Space to grow.

Transparency and Accountability Policy

Contents

Where to find the information you need:

Introduction and policy purpose	1
Policy statement	2
Scope	3
Principles of transparency and accountability	4
Proactive disclosure	5
Disclosure on request	6
Resident engagement mechanisms	7
Responsibilities	8
Regulatory framework	9
Training and awareness	10
Reporting	11
Communication	12

1 Introduction: the purpose of this policy

We're committed to operating with the highest levels of transparency and accountability, particularly with our residents. This policy sets out our approach to meeting the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and proactively addresses the principles of the forthcoming Social Tenants Access to Information Standard. By adhering to this policy, we aim to build and maintain trust with our residents, stakeholders, and the wider community, ensuring that our operations are open, understandable, and subject to appropriate scrutiny.

2 Policy statement

2.1 We believe that transparency and accountability are fundamental to good governance and effective service delivery. We are committed to:

- providing clear, accurate, and timely information to our residents and other stakeholders
- ensuring that our decision-making processes are understandable and accessible
- establishing effective ways for residents to hold us accountable for our performance and services
- fostering a culture of openness and responsiveness throughout West Kent.

3 Scope

This policy applies to all employees, board members, and contractors working on behalf of West Kent. It covers all aspects of our operations that are relevant to transparency and accountability, particularly those impacting residents.

4 Principles of transparency and accountability

4.1 Our approach is guided by the following principles:

Disclosure

4.2 We will proactively publish information that residents and stakeholders need to understand our operations, scrutinise our performance and hold us to account. We will also provide appropriate information in response to requests and queries regarding our operations and performance.

Accessibility

- 4.3 Information will be provided in formats that are accessible and easy to understand for all residents, taking into account diverse needs and preferences (e.g., plain English, large print, alternative languages where appropriate).

Timeliness

- 4.4 Information will be published and updated in a timely manner, ensuring its relevance and accuracy.

Accuracy

- 4.5 All information provided will be accurate and reliable.

Responsiveness

- 4.6 We will respond promptly and constructively to requests for information and feedback from residents.

Empowerment

- 4.7 We will empower residents to access information and participate in decision-making processes, enabling them to influence and hold us to account.

5 Proactive disclosure

- 5.1 We're committed to proactively publishing and making readily available information in the following key areas:

Our organisation

- our mission, vision, and values
- details of our board members and senior management team, including roles and responsibilities
- our governance structure and how decisions are made
- our most recent annual report and financial statements
- key policies and procedures relevant to residents (like repairs, allocations, anti-social behaviour, complaints)
- our corporate plan and strategic objectives.

Services and performance

- service standards and performance against those standards (like repairs completion times, health and safety compliance, complaints handling times)

- resident satisfaction survey results
- information on how to report a repair and our typical response times
- details of planned maintenance and major works programmes, including anticipated timescales and impact on residents
- rent and service charge setting policies and breakdowns
- information on how to access support services (like welfare rights, employment support).
- relevant regulatory judgements.

Resident engagement

- how residents can get involved in influencing our services and decisions
- details of resident groups, forums, and committees
- information on how to become a board member or join resident engagement structures
- outcomes of resident engagement activities and how resident feedback has influenced decisions.

Complaints and redress:

- our complaints policy and procedure, including clear explanation of the stages and timescales
- information on the rights of residents and how they can escalate a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service
- summary of complaints received and outcomes.

6 Disclosure on request (anticipating the Social Tenants Access to Information Standard)

6.1 In addition to proactive disclosure, we will establish clear processes for residents to request specific information. While we wait for details of the Social Tenants Access to Information Standard, we will adopt the following principles:

Right to request

6.2 Residents have a right to request information (subject to data protection principles) about:

- their tenancy agreement and its terms

- their rent and service charge accounts
- repair history for their individual property
- records relating to their individual interactions with us
- information relating to specific decisions that affect them or their community.

Clear request process

6.3 We will establish a clear, simple, and accessible process for residents to make information requests, including:

- designated contact points (like email address, postal address, online form)
- guidance on the type of information that can be requested.

Timely responses

6.4 We will aim to respond to information requests promptly, within the statutory deadline (aligning with Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR principles where appropriate, or as specified by the incoming standard).

Reasons for refusal

6.5 Any refusal to provide information will be clearly justified, citing relevant exemptions (like personal data of third parties, commercially sensitive information or information which is subject to legal privilege). Residents will be informed of their right to appeal such decisions.

Accessible formats

6.6 Information will be provided in formats requested by the resident where reasonably practicable.

Designated information officer

6.7 The Data Protection and Policy Officer will be responsible for managing information requests and ensuring compliance with this policy and the incoming standard.

7 Resident Engagement Mechanisms

7.1 We're committed to providing meaningful opportunities for residents to engage with us and influence decisions. We recognise that this is a key means of us to be transparent and accountable with our residents, allowing them to scrutinise our performance and ensure we achieve the principles set out in this policy. Full details of our resident engagement mechanisms are set out on our website: westkent.org/residentinvolvement

8 Responsibilities

- 8.1 **The Board:** Has ultimate responsibility for overseeing the implementation and effectiveness of this policy, ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.
- 8.2 **Chief Executive/Senior Management Team:** Responsible for day-to-day implementation of the policy, allocating resources, and ensuring staff are trained and aware of their responsibilities.
- 8.3 **Data Protection and Policy Officer:** Responsible for coordinating information disclosure, managing information requests, supporting resident engagement activities, and ensuring compliance with relevant standards.
- 8.4 **All employees:** Responsible for adhering to the principles of this policy in their daily work, providing accurate information, and responding respectfully to resident enquiries and feedback.

9 Regulatory framework

- 9.1 This policy is developed in accordance with:

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

- 9.2 This standard requires us to be transparent with our residents and to ensure they can influence and hold us to account. Key aspects include:

- providing relevant, accessible, and timely information
- listening to and acting on tenant feedback
- involving tenants in decisions that affect them
- having clear complaints and redress mechanisms.

Anticipated Social Tenants Access to Information Standard

- 9.3 While the full details of this standard are awaited, it is expected to significantly enhance residents' rights to access information about their homes and services that we provide for them. This policy incorporates proactive measures to align with the anticipated principles of greater information access.

Other relevant legislation

- 9.4 Including but not limited to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

10 Training and awareness

10.1 All new and existing staff, particularly those in resident-facing roles, will receive appropriate training on this policy and its implications. Training will cover:

- the importance of transparency and accountability
- how to handle information requests from residents
- our complaints procedure and the role of the Housing Ombudsman
- effective resident engagement practices
- data protection principles when handling resident information.

11 Reporting

11.1 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, or sooner if there are significant changes in legislation or regulatory requirements. The review will assess:

- our compliance with the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and the anticipated Social Tenants Access to Information Standard
- the effectiveness of our information provision and access mechanisms
- resident feedback on our transparency and accountability practices
- the effectiveness of our resident influence and accountability mechanisms
- any learning points from complaints or regulatory engagement relating to transparency and accountability.

11.2 The results of the review will be reported to the Board and, where appropriate, shared with residents.

12 Communication

12.1 This policy is aimed at employees, board members, and contractors working on behalf of West Kent, and also provides residents with an understanding of our approach to transparency and accountability. The policy is published on our website and on our intranet to ensure that all relevant stakeholders have access. It covers all aspects of our operations that are relevant to transparency and accountability, particularly those impacting residents.