



Mansfield District Council
Creating a District where People can Succeed

Tenant Involvement Strategy

2012-15

TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY 2012-15

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FOREWORD

Hayley Barsby – Head of Housing

Councillor Mick Colley – Portfolio Holder for Housing (Housing Needs and Landlord Services)

Welcome to our new Tenant Involvement Strategy which covers the period 2012-15.

The Strategy sets out our aims and objectives for Tenant Involvement at Mansfield District Council and is the result of several months of hard work by members of Mansfield District Tenants Forum, Elected Members and Council Officers

It sets out all the ways that tenants can get involved, the level of commitment required and ensures that everyone has the opportunity to get involved at a level and pace of their choosing.

The strategy also identifies areas where we need to improve in order to achieve our aim and identifies what action we will take to improve in these areas.



Hayley Barsby
Head of Housing

Introduction

The Tenant Involvement Strategy 2012-15 is the latest chapter in a long history of partnership working between Mansfield District Council's Housing Department and its tenants. It builds on the strong foundations of old with the new strategy seeing a continuation of the commitment of the formal and informal involvement of all tenants in Mansfield in the decisions that affect their homes, communities and the services that they receive.

It sets out the priorities and actions to be taken over the next three years and supports the overall approach to involving tenants in housing, estate and neighbourhood management in accordance with best practice and government guidance.

Aims and Objectives of the Strategy

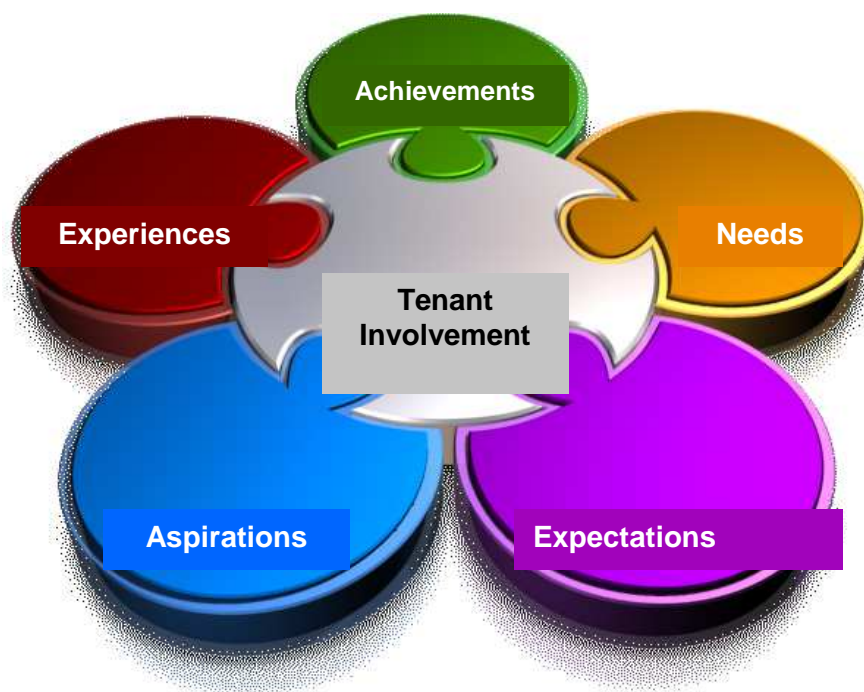
The Strategy is based on five themes – broadening, deepening, embedding, maximising and scrutinising, which when addressed, will enable Mansfield District Council's housing service to achieve its overall aim to:

“All tenants to have the opportunity and choice to directly influence the decisions that affect their homes, communities and the standards of services that they expect”.

What is Tenant Involvement?

The overall aim of tenant involvement is to understand the needs, expectations, aspirations achievements and experiences of Mansfield District Council tenants and to improve services as a result of this.

Fig 1



Why do we need a Tenant Involvement Strategy?

Nationally tenant involvement strategies are part of the Governments' agenda, to improve services for local people. The aim is to place tenants at the heart of decision-making and service delivery; to ensure that tenants have a real say in how landlords manage their homes and neighbourhoods. The Strategy should outline how tenants can get involved on issues that affect them and how tenants and their landlords can work together to improve tenant involvement

By involving tenants, there are many benefits to both the housing department and tenants such as: -

- Ensuring high levels of tenant satisfaction with their homes and neighbourhoods
- Learning from our tenants' experiences as service users to inform the continuous improvement of housing services
- Development of our services so that they become more appropriate to tenants' individual and collective needs
- Ensuring that services are delivered in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.
- Ensuring that tenants are involved in making decisions that affect them and the community in which they live
- Enhancing tenants' skills, knowledge, confidence and quality of life

Changing national agenda for tenant involvement

The national agenda for tenant involvement has changed considerably over the last 2 years. Tenant empowerment and involvement is at the heart of the Governments drive to ensure the delivery of quality housing services and ensure that decent homes are available to all who rent from social housing landlords. The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was launched on 1 December 2008 and became the new social housing regulator for local authorities from 1 April 2010.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was established by the enactment of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, and was given powers to create a new regulatory framework for social housing within England. The new framework placed a greater emphasis on the relationship between Mansfield District Council and its tenants at a local level.

The regulatory framework set out the commitment to co – regulation, that is, that the regulator expects robust self regulation by boards and councillors who govern the delivery of housing services, incorporating effective tenant involvement.

The TSA was abolished in April 2012 and what remained of its regulatory functions were transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

From April 2012 a new regulatory framework was introduced which set out the revised principles of co regulation to reflect changes brought about by the Localism Act and standards that housing providers must meet.

Principles of Co regulation

- Boards and councillors who govern providers are responsible and accountable for delivering their organisation's social housing objectives
- Providers must meet the regulatory standards
- Transparency and accountability is central to co regulation
- Tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible boards and councillors to account
- Providers should understand the particular needs of their tenants
- Value for money goes to the heart of how providers ensure current and future delivery of their objectives.

Standards for registered providers

The table below summarises the regulatory standards that providers are expected to meet

Table 1

ECONOMIC STANDARD*	INCLUDES
Governance and financial viability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Governance▪ Financial viability
Value for Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Value for money
Rent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ rent
CONSUMER STANDARD	INCLUDES
Tenant involvement and empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ customer service, choice and complaints▪ involvement and empowerment▪ understanding and responding to diverse needs of tenants
Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ quality of accommodation▪ repairs and maintenance
Tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ allocation and mutual exchange▪ tenure
Neighbourhood and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ neighbourhood management▪ local area co operation▪ anti social behaviour

- These standards do not apply to local authorities

Involvement and Empowerment Standard

This strategy has been developed to ensure that we comply specifically with the required outcomes and specific expectations of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.

Required outcomes

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

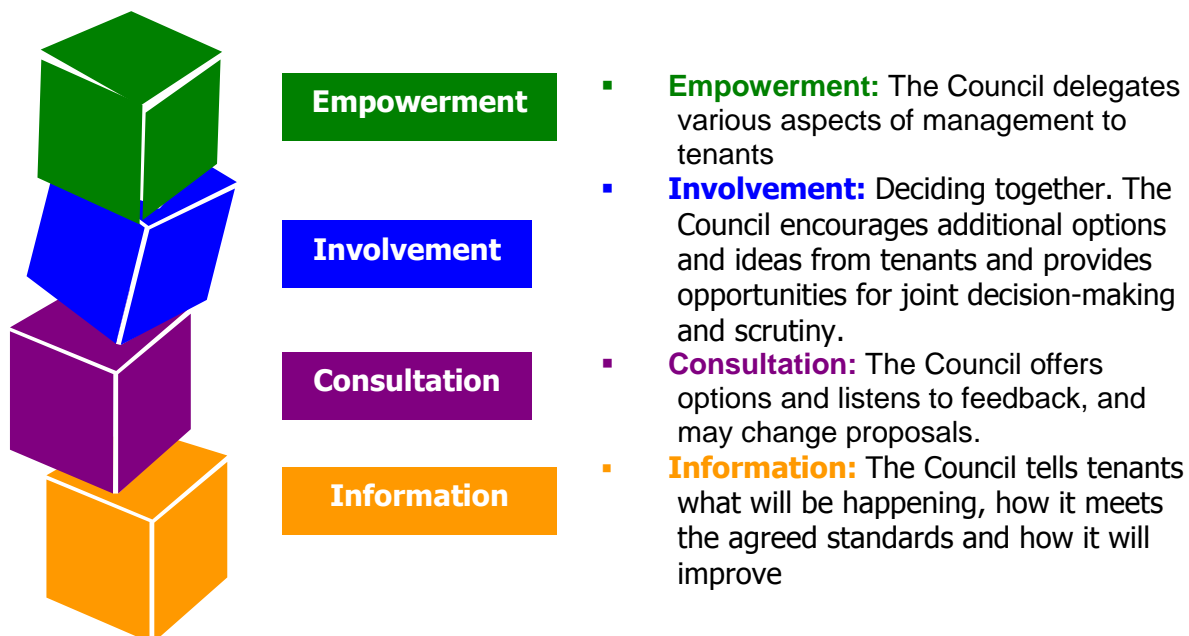
- The formulation of their landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities
- The making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- The scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved

- The management of their homes, where applicable
- The management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and sharing the savings made
- Agreeing local offers for service delivery

How we meet the required outcomes

In order to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved we offer different levels of involvement ranging from purely receiving information regarding the housing service to actually having the option to directly manage various aspects of the service.

Fig 2 provides an overview of the different levels of involvement available to tenants



We recognise that tenants want to give their views or be involved in different ways and we offer a number of ways in which tenants can get involved in influencing decisions within the housing service in a way that suits them.

The menu of involvement options (on the following page) acknowledges the busy world in which we live and gives an illustration of some of the options available and the time required. It is not an exhaustive list, as new mechanisms will be developed to offer maximum choice and opportunities for people to participate.

CURRENT INVOLVEMENT METHOD

EXPLANATION

Involvement

Deciding together. The Council encourages additional options and ideas from tenants and provides opportunities for joint decision-making and scrutiny.

Tenant and Resident groups/associations	<p>Useful for: Meeting with Housing officers and other departments and agencies to address local problems and help make improvements</p> <p>Key feature: working collectively to resolve local issues.</p> <p>Commitment level: dependent on agreed frequency of meetings and individual commitment</p>
Mansfield District Tenant and Resident Forum	<p>Useful for: supporting existing groups and promoting tenant involvement</p> <p>Key feature: scrutinising the effectiveness of the tenant involvement framework and recommending improvements</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours once a month (8 months)</p>
Estate Walkabouts	<p>Useful for: Meeting with your Housing Officer and representatives from other agencies who work in your area to point out problems and issues that could be improved.</p> <p>Key features: Getting to know the Housing Officers. Getting local environmental issues resolved/dealt with.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 – 3 hours, four times a year in each area</p>
Housing Services Panel	<p>Useful for: Scrutinising housing services performance against agreed standards for housing services and making recommendations for improvement</p> <p>Key feature: allows the housing service to meet the regulatory standards and co regulatory approach</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 - 3 hours once a month (8 months)</p>
Mystery Shopping / service inspectors	<p>Useful for: Inspecting housing to make sure that they meet published standards.</p> <p>Key features: Shoppers are anonymous. An opportunity to help identify improvements to services</p> <p>Commitment level: dependant on activity and need</p>

Consultation

The Council offers options and listens to feedback, and may change proposals.

Complaints/Compliments	<p>Useful for: Helping Housing to identify areas for improvement and also how we are performing.</p> <p>Key features: Open and available to any tenant at any time.</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary</p>
Focus Groups / Continuous Improvement Groups	<p>Useful for: Gives tenants the opportunity to give their views on one specific topic.</p> <p>Key features: No additional work involved. Meetings should not be any longer than approximately 2 hours.</p> <p>Commitment level: either 4 times a year or as and when held, 2 - 3 hours duration</p>
Open Meetings on “stand-alone” issues	<p>Useful for: Tenants to forward their views and opinions to council officers on “stand-alone” issues e.g. spending priorities, choice of kitchen units, bathroom suites etc. Local communities discussing issues, recommendations and improvements with housing representatives</p> <p>Key features: Enables tenants to have choice and influence to determine priorities for their home/communities. Depending on the project, it may mean attendance at more than one meeting.</p> <p>Commitment level: Take part as and when held, 2 - 3 hours duration</p>
Specialist Forums	<p>Useful for: Gives tenants from hard to reach groups a collective voice.</p> <p>Key features: Similar to focus groups but focus on engaging with tenants who are hard to reach or seldom heard from. For example, leaseholders and sheltered housing residents.</p> <p>Commitment level: 2 - 3 hours, quarterly</p>
Surveys/Questionnaires	<p>Useful for: Providing us with feedback on particular subjects. The information is helpful in planning revised or new services.</p> <p>Key features: An opportunity for you to give your views on our services and performance, and to influence future planning.</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary, dependent on the timing and nature of the survey/questionnaire</p>

Information

The Council tells tenants what will be happening, how we meet the standards and what we are going to do to improve

Information, Handbooks and Leaflets	<p>Useful for: Keeping tenants up to date. Easy access to information about services.</p> <p>Key features: Tenancy/repairs handbooks are provided to all tenants when they move in. These provide advice on rights, responsibilities and how to report faults. Other leaflets are available from the area office or on-line</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary</p>
Local Information Notices	<p>Useful for: Finding out what is happening in your area. Sometimes these are directly delivered to tenants' homes or more often notices will be posted in the area office of tenants meeting rooms etc.</p> <p>Key features: Information provided could include invitations to events where you can discuss plans for your area</p> <p>Commitment level: Will vary</p>
Newsletters	<p>Useful for: Keeping you up to date on what is happening both in Housing and your area and providing information on our performance.</p> <p>Key features: Newsletter produce twice a year and tenants annual report produced October and sent to all tenants.</p> <p>Commitment level: will vary</p>

Core Standards for Tenant Involvement

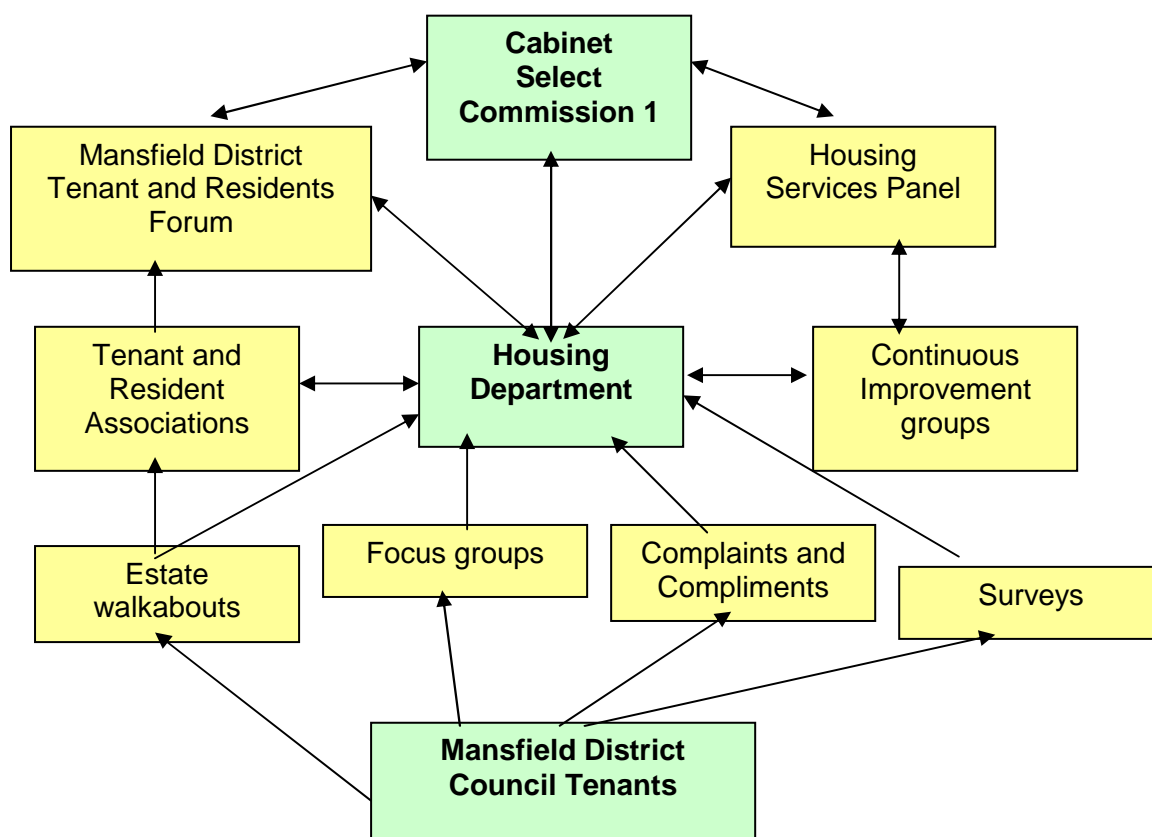
The Council wants to make sure that tenants can participate and contribute effectively to the decision making processes. As a result we have developed three core standards to ensure that tenants participate in a fair and consistent manner and that tenants know what to expect from the Council when they get involved. The standards cover the following areas: -

- Standards for resources / support
- Standards for meetings
- Standards for information
- Making a complaint

A copy of these standards can be found at appendix 1

The diagram overleaf shows the current tenant participation structure within Mansfield District Council. It shows how tenant involvement currently works within the Council and supports our current menu of involvement options listed above

Fig 1: Tenant Involvement Structure in Mansfield



Tenant Involvement – A Review

In 2011, a review of Tenant Involvement was undertaken by Council Officers, Elected Members and Mansfield District Tenant and Residents Forum. The review took into account existing practice, consultation with tenants, regulation, best practice and benchmarking information (VFM assessment)

Mansfield District Tenant and Residents Forum – held two sessions in December 2011 to look at the existing structures for involvement. Feedback from the sessions, which included results from a SWOT analysis (see appendix 2) identified several areas for improvement and led to the development of the five themes for which this strategy is based upon.

A STAR survey - was completed in December 2011 which allowed us to measure tenant and resident satisfaction and identify whether the housing service is meeting, exceeding or failing tenant and resident expectations.

In the emergent environment of co-regulation, and tenant and resident-led self-regulation, access to satisfaction data has become more rather than less important to social housing providers. In the absence of close regulatory scrutiny or housing inspection, satisfaction

measurement is the single most useful source of data for reporting tenant and resident-focused outcomes and engaging respondents and residents in what their social housing providers do.

Notably, whilst general levels of satisfaction have improved since the last satisfaction survey was completed in 2008/09 (STATUS), the results from the survey identified some areas where improvements were needed, including the way in which we as a service deal with complaints. The need to raise awareness of our service standards and how to challenge those standards was also a factor that was highlighted in the results of the survey.

Benchmarking - A key element of the STAR framework is that it provides a standardised approach to satisfaction measurement that enables the housing service to make meaningful performance comparisons with the hundreds of other providers working in the sector and monitor trends over time

Put together with cost and performance data in HouseMark's core benchmarking service, the STAR survey provides the basis upon which value for money can be judged (i.e. not just whether providers are doing the right things but also whether they are doing things right) and identify the best opportunities for improving performance.

In 2011 Resident Involvement was assessed as a high cost /high performing service area

Tenant Involvement – The Future

As a result of the review, five key themes emerged as areas for improvement including:

Broadening – We recognise the contribution made by our traditional structure for involvement and we will continue to support and work with these structures to make them more effective.

However, we recognise that the majority of our tenants are not involved in these traditional involvement structures. We therefore need to make more effort to ensure we reach all sections of the community by offering more ways for tenants to engage in a way that suits them

Deepening – We recognise that when we have engaged with tenants in the past, insufficient time has been allowed for them to have a meaningful say and we need to move towards more informed and constructive engagement. Deepening also means increasing the ability of tenants and residents groups to bring benefits to their communities through training, networking, good information and access to advice and support

Embedding – Traditionally, involving and engaging with tenants has mainly been seen as the role of Tenant involvement staff, however housing management staff should also play a key role and embedding tenant involvement will mean that every member of staff will have a clear role and responsibility for tenant involvement.

Maximising – For our tenants, their experience of living in Council housing is about more than the immediate housing service. It's about the wider environment, security, access to services and amenities including education and work.

In order to give our tenants a chance to have influence, the housing department cannot work in isolation and we recognise that it is often possible to achieve better results when services join up and work together to avoid duplication.

We will also look at all engagement activity with a view to maximising outcomes (benefits and improvements) for inputs (time and money) and assess where activities are / are not providing value for money

Scrutinising – Whilst our arrangements for scrutiny have advanced over the last year, we recognise work still needs to be done to improve and expand our arrangements for scrutiny.

In order for the Housing Service to address these issues, a detailed action plan for 2012 – 2014 (See Appendix 3) has been devised based on the five themes.

Monitoring and reviewing tenant Involvement

The action plan will be subject to an annual update and regular review with progress being monitored by the Mansfield District Tenants and Residents Forum as part of their monitoring and scrutiny role for Tenant Involvement, with the success of the strategy being measured by:

- Achievements against targets and measurable outcomes in the action plan
- Benchmarking with other high performing landlords
- Feedback from tenants, staff and elected members
- Annual impact assessment

Appendix 1

Standards for Tenant Involvement

STANDARDS FOR SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Financial Support

New Tenant and Resident Associations

- A start up grant of £250 for new groups to enable them to advertise meetings and see if there is enough interest to make a new group viable

Existing recognised Tenant and Resident Associations

- An annual grant, dependent on the number of properties covered by the group, is issued on receiving a copy of the recognition criteria form, a copy of accounts and a copy of their constitution if amended
- A computer up to the value of £500 for use by the group
- Travel expenses in line with council rates to all council led meetings
- Support for room hire costs where no appropriate tenant meeting rooms are available
- Financial support for administration including photocopying of minutes, promotional information including the production of neighbourhood newsletters

Individual Tenant and Residents

- Travel expenses in line with council rates to all council led meetings
- Lunch expenses in line with council rates, payable for full day events where lunch is not provided
- Financial support for administration including production of promotional information and newsletters

Advice and Support – Tenant Involvement Officer

New Tenant and Resident Associations

- Information on how to get started
- Advice on the roles and relationship between Tenants and Residents and Council officers
- Working with and training housing department staff to improve standards in community consultation and involvement
- An individually tailored training strategy for each new Association

Existing Recognised Tenant and Resident Associations

- Ongoing advice and assistance in promoting the Association
- Advice on best practice and new developments/policy initiatives in Tenant Involvement.

Individual Tenant and Resident

- Publicity for all the options for involvement
- Advice, support and encouragement to Tenants who want to become more involved in the Housing Service

Advice and Support – Housing Management Staff

Existing Tenant and Resident Associations

- Area housing staff will work with groups on their estates to ensure that neighbourhood and community issues are dealt with at a local level

- Housing staff will arrange for other council departments to address groups on specific issues
- Key staff will attend Tenant and Resident meetings by invitation.

Standards for Meetings

The Housing Service is committed to holding its meetings according to the following guidelines

Timing

What can be expected from us?

- Training, conferences and meetings will be held at various times, to maximise attendance.
- Evening meetings should not start later than 7pm or finish later than 9pm
- Meetings should not normally last longer than 2 hours, they will include suitable breaks
- Meetings will start and finish on time
- Meetings will be properly chaired and everyone asked to keep to the agenda
- Minutes will be taken and distributed to all present
- Refreshments will be supplied where possible

What can be expected of Tenant and Resident Associations?

- Council officers should be told how long they will be expected to attend at meetings
- Pre-meetings should be held with council staff where possible
- Meetings should start and finish on time
- Meetings should be properly chaired and all representatives asked to keep to the agenda
- Groups should provide refreshments where possible
- Minutes should be taken and distributed to all who attend
- Where possible, matters that need contributions from officers should be first on the agenda

Information

What can be expected from us?

- Groups and others likely to attend should receive at least 10 working days notice of meetings, with written agendas and background papers (where this is not possible they should get at least 5 working days notice)
- We will provide information in accordance with the principles outlined in the communication and consultation strategy
- Where we distribute information to an area with specific needs we will try to send information appropriate to those needs. This may affect the time-scale
- We will circulate feedback to those attending meetings/conferences within 10 working days (specific group arrangements may differ from this by separate agreement)

What can be expected of Tenant and Resident Associations

- Officers and councillors should receive 5 working days written notice of tenants meetings, with the agenda and background papers. (Where this is not possible they should receive at least 3 working days notice)
- Where possible, groups should contact officers first to organise their attendance
- If the group knows in advance what questions they want to ask the officer attending, they should get them to him or her beforehand

- Leaflets should go to all households within the local area publicising the meeting as far in advance as possible
- Minutes/feedback should be displayed at the local housing office (where possible) and any notice board in their area
- Copies of minutes should be available on request
- Feedback/minutes will go to all who attend as soon as possible
- Information should be sent to all households in the local area

Environment

- Meetings will conform with equal opportunity requirements
- All those present will be treated with respect
- Refreshments will be provided at council led meetings
- Individual issues will not be discussed within a meeting
- There will be no smoking at meetings
- Meetings will not normally last longer than 2 hours
- Meetings lasting longer than 2 hours will have appropriate breaks
- Meetings should be in a friendly environment with a constructive approach
- Individual cases will not be discussed within a meeting
-

Support

What can be expected from us?

We will:

- Print leaflets for meetings on behalf of groups where appropriate
- Contribute towards the cost of childcare to a maximum of £20, where this cost restricts attendance at council-led meetings
- Fund individuals for their attendance at specific council-led meetings/conferences. If they provide receipts and complete an expenses claim form
- Provide relevant training to groups to ensure meetings run effectively

Making a Complaint

All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with our complaints procedure

Appendix 2

Mansfield District Tenant and Residents Forum – Tenant Involvement review

STRENGTHS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present Volunteers• Good Structure for TRA• Support• Resources• Training• Information - Format/Methods• Good Relationships- Officer/Tenants• Partnerships• Networks• Facebook	WEAKNESS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not Inclusive• Lack of Communication• Lack of Information• Apathy• Over reliance on traditional methods of Involvement• Some areas are not covered by groups• Promotion of involvement structure• Not providing feedback• Negative perceptions• New client groups not catered for• Don't measure impact for TI• Duplication
OPPORTUNITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotion• Change – Willingness learning from others• Inclusion – working collectively to address local issues• Stakeholders Groups• Review Group• TSA Regulatory standard	THREATS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reliance on small number of people• Sustainability• Loss of Experience• Loss of Appetite from involved members• Expect too much• Time• Other Interests• Lack of innovation• Funding• Society