



## Waverley Borough Council

### Tenant Involvement Strategy 2011 - 2014



Welcome to Waverley Borough Council's Tenant Involvement Strategy for 2011 – 2014. The purpose of the strategy is to provide a structure for improving the housing service through actively encouraging tenants and leaseholders to be involved. This strategy promotes effective communication between tenants, leaseholders, councillors and staff.

Tenants and leaseholders are at the heart of the housing service; councillors and officers hold that value. To ensure everyone has the chance to take part in shaping the service we will provide opportunities and choice for each individual to get involved at whatever level suits their life commitments.

This document shares -

- Why are we producing this strategy now?
- Why get involved?
- Ways of getting involved.
- Support & Training.
- Communicating.
- Measuring the value of Involvement.
- Moving forward to 2014.

### **Why are we producing this strategy now?**

There is already a history of successful tenant involvement in Waverley and we want to build on this so even more tenants and leaseholders can adopt that power. A Tenants' Panel has been in place for over 15 years working on behalf of tenants in Waverley to give a voice in important housing decisions. There are also many other ways that tenants have been involved during these years including work such as: Focus Groups; Neighbourhood Agreements; consultation meetings; conferences; a tenants blog; approving the leaflets we produce for tenants and sitting on committees with councillors.

The national agenda for public services is changing and it is more important than ever that we make sure we are delivering the best value for money we can for the rent you pay. One way of making sure this happens is to give tenants and leaseholders of housing services even more opportunity to influence decisions.

## **Why get involved?**

Waverley Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011 contains five priorities, four of which are an essential part of the housing service - environment, improving lives, affordable housing & value for money. To improve delivery of these priorities we believe that the housing service must involve tenants and leaseholders by offering them the opportunity to influence change and set standard levels.

The Big Society is a key policy being developed by the Government and its views on localism are contained in the Draft Structural Reform Plan (July 2010). Communities are being encouraged to take control over their local area so they can make a purposeful difference to the residents who live there. Tenants & leaseholders can use this opportunity to help make improvements in their home, road, estate or town.

As a tenant or a leaseholder you might want to make a difference in your community. This could be by creating a neighbourhood agreement or establishing a local resident group involving tenants & leaseholders. The work can help improve an area such as an estate by understanding the needs of the people who live there. We can help you to start-up these projects using Waverley's experience and voluntary agencies to assist you with funding and support to ensure the project is achieved. An example of a recent successful community project is The Chantry in Farnham: here Waverley and Registered Social Landlord tenants, leaseholders and owners have worked together with councillors, voluntary groups, Surrey County Council, the community police team and Waverley staff to make a real difference in the area through a "Neighbourhood Agreement" – the first in Surrey.

With communication, support and training tenants and leaseholders have an opportunity to be part of change, which will impact on themselves, their families and their community.

***Tenant involvement can change policy, service delivery and costs, which improves lives, the environment and gets value for money.***

## Ways of getting involved

Sometimes making the choice to get involved depends upon life commitments. We understand this and over the past few years we have created a range of options for tenants and leaseholders to choose from which offer different levels of time commitment. These include:

- ❖ Being an estate monitor
- ❖ Estate walkabouts
- ❖ Conferences and workshops
- ❖ Tenants Panel
- ❖ Local meetings
- ❖ Police Panel meetings
- ❖ Reading group
- ❖ Focus groups
- ❖ Mystery shopping
- ❖ Helping to select and appoint contractors
- ❖ Contract monitoring group
- ❖ Helping to edit Waverley Homes and People

You can read more about these in the [Tenant Activities](#) section at the end of the document.

Some tenants and leaseholders might also have a particular interest in representing housing services at our disability or faith forum. These groups give the chance to voice opinions on not only housing services, but also on wider community issues.

Although these are all very valuable ways of improving housing services we now want to advance involvement over the next three years to give more tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to scrutinise policies and services. Some examples of how we could do this include: tenants and leaseholders voting on elements of the annual budget; meeting with the housing officers on service performance groups to set standards; scrutinising our performance against these service standards and examining value for money when major repairs programmes are taking place.

In consultation with you we would like to develop more opportunities for people to become involved to enhance what is currently in place.

***We are committed to providing as many opportunities as tenants and leaseholders need to make a difference.***

## **Support & Training**

With busy lives we understand that everyone's time is precious and in some cases commitments such as caring for relatives or looking after families can make this even more challenging.

We want to build on what is already in place to support tenant and leaseholder involvement by setting out what support we can offer to help you to participate. We understand that this needs to be wide-ranging to include various elements of support such as child or carer costs, mileage rates and appreciation payments for attending some activities. We have set these out in **Support & Training**.

The strategy has been created with the belief that all tenants & leaseholders should have the opportunity to get involved in shaping the housing service, but we understand you might feel you do not have the right level of understanding or knowledge to achieve that goal. Therefore we aim to develop a comprehensive training programme to help you with a range of different options. For some, this could be an opportunity to complete a Chartered Institute of Housing accredited course, which could be of interest to potential employers. Others may wish to have mentoring from an officer, councillor or Tenant Panel member to guide them.

Training and support in involvement not only will improve your experience, it also gives you knowledge to use in other areas of your life.

***We are committed to providing support for you so there are no barriers to getting involved.***

## Communicating

We have listened to you and appreciate that we need to improve our communications. We want to get better at letting you know about changes that have come about as a result of tenant and leaseholder involvement. Therefore we are committed to making this happen. Our **Action Plan** has set out how we will do this.

Some of the resources we currently use for communicating are: the website [www.waverley.gov.uk](http://www.waverley.gov.uk); Waverley Homes & People - the newsletter sent to tenants & leaseholders; and through the Tenants Panel. In the next three years we will open up more channels of communication, for example, using text and email and utilising housing service mail shots. We will also look at new ideas, for example a free phone number for tenant involvement and will explore this further in consultation with you.

When we send a document to tenants and leaseholders for consultation we will promise to offer 'in good time' practice. This means that the reader will have enough time to read it thoroughly and make comments.

Sometimes we may want to consult larger groups about issues such as budget setting or policy making. One of the ways we could do this is to take part in a family day event giving tenants, leaseholders and their families the chance to give us your views, which can feed into the decision-making process.

Waverley Borough Council's Equality Strategy 2009 –2011 offers 'equal life chances for all'. We want to ensure that there are no barriers for people to get involved. We will offer ways to help tenants & leaseholders with individual needs, for example translation services, accessible meeting venues and large print documents.

***Communication is about ensuring you are heard and then letting you know what has happened as a result of your views.***

## Compliments and Complaints

We want to share our compliments & complaints with tenants & leaseholders. Within the timeframe of this strategy we will publish information about complaints you have made with evidence of the outcomes, displaying our response times and whether the complaints were upheld or not. We will also take pride in sharing with you the compliments we receive.

As an area of good practice to develop we will also research, with your help, the possibility of setting up a complaints panel consisting of tenants and leaseholders to monitor the volume and nature of complaints and look at opportunities for service improvement.

***Learning from feedback we can shape our housing service to be more successful.***

## Measuring Involvement

Working with tenants and leaseholders we will create a way of measuring how successful an involvement activity has been. We will ask searching questions to assess this. For example –

- Did the involvement activity meet it's objective?
- What difference did it make?
- Did it deliver value for money?
- What could be done to improve the activity?
- How satisfied were the tenants and leaseholders with the activity?

Tenants, leaseholders and staff will all be invited to complete these assessments.

Using cost effective opportunities we will check our performance against other social landlords. We will compare ourselves with other councils and housing associations both nationally and locally. We can also use opportunities to work jointly with other neighbouring authorities on activities such as mystery shopping.

Whatever the activity, large or small, it is important to remember that any result from getting involved must be assessed to learn from the results.

Measuring the outcomes from involvement will ensure value for money and more importantly tenant and leaseholders will receive an improved service.

***Measuring the outcomes from involvement will demonstrate the difference made.***

### **Moving forward to 2014**

The need to move tenant involvement forward is identified in this strategy and to help make that happen an **Action Plan** has been developed. This has identified areas of work that can be measured against results. Throughout the 3 -year life of the strategy we undertake to carry out the projects in the action plan. We will review the work with tenants and leaseholders to ensure it stays meaningful and up to date and provide regular feedback on our progress.

***This strategy describes a new path for involvement in which you help shape the future of the housing service so we can deliver on value for money and improve lives.***