



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



Customer Engagement Strategy

2021 - 2024



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Borough Council

Introduction

Darlington Housing Services has a long history of working with our tenants to help shape their communities and influence decisions about their homes and the services we provide. Our approach to tenant engagement and participation is embedded in our culture of openness and honesty, demonstrated through our resident groups and tenant's panel.

This strategy sets out how we will continue to involve and empower our tenants, ensuring they are at the heart of everything we do. It also sets out how we will explore new ways to engage with our tenants and ensure that no-one is left out.

Our strategy will help us to strengthen and expand opportunities for our tenants to make a positive difference to our services and future direction.

Our Aims

- Provide our tenants with the right information and hold us to account.
- Ensure our tenants can give us their views in the ways they want to and make their voice heard.
- Improve and expand the ways our tenants can be involved and participate in decision making.
- Improve the ways we can engage with our tenants through digital and social media channels.
- Empower tenants by providing training opportunities to ensure they have the right skills to make a meaningful contribution.
- Involve our tenants in making key decisions, such as improving safety and tackling climate change.
- Work with our tenants to improve services and help us implement change.
- Ensure we provide our tenants with feedback following consultation.
- Learn from complaints about our services, put things right and be open and honest when things haven't gone so well.
- Work with our partners to get the best outcomes for our tenants.



Councillor Kevin Nicholson,
Health and Housing
Portfolio Holder

Our Priorities

1 Providing the right information

We will provide our tenants with the right information about our services in the ways they want. We will encourage our tenants to use our digital services, providing opportunities for everyone to be involved. We will ensure that we provide the right level of support for our tenants to access our services, ensuring no-one is excluded.

How will we do this?

- We will make all of our written communications easy to understand and clear about how our tenants can access services, providing information in a way that suits our tenants.
- We will provide up to date information about our services through our easy to use website and Housing Facebook page.
- We will provide the right level of support with explanations and advice on how our tenants can use our digital services and through our Darlington Home Online service.
- We will regularly update our social media platforms giving tenants information about their homes and the area they live in. We will also provide a forum where tenants can provide feedback on our services.
- We will provide telephone and face to face services for those who need it and ensure our staff are always on hand to speak to our tenants.





How will we know we have been successful?

- All of our written communications will be in Plain English and approved by our reader's panel.
- Increased hits to our website pages and more subscribers to our Facebook page.
- More subscribers to the Darlington Home Online service.
- Less calls to our housing contact team, with more support provided to the people who need us the most.
- Positive feedback from our tenants about the information we provide and the ways in which they can contact us.

2 Listening to our tenants

We will encourage and grow tenant involvement and participation. We will provide opportunities for our tenants to develop and feel fulfilled. We will put our tenants at the heart of everything we do and ensure their voice is heard.

How will we do this?

- We will provide a range of opportunities for our tenants to give their views and get involved through surveys, our tenant's panel, and mystery shopping.
- We will give clear expectations and explanations of the role our tenants will play in engagement activities and how these will shape services.
- We will develop training opportunities to ensure everyone has the right skills to get involved and participate fully in activities which they feel are important to them.
- We will understand the barriers to effective engagement and take action to remove them.



- We will listen to the views of young people, understand the issues that are of concern to them and help them find solutions.
- We will ensure community activities support locally prioritised actions.
- We will create a positive engagement culture where all staff understand the importance of customer engagement and actively promote it as an essential part of their roles.

How will we know we have been successful?

- Increased tenant participation and evidence that tenants have given their views through a range of activities.
- Our tenant's panel are consulted about key decisions affecting our services. Training is provided to ensure their contribution is valued and meaningful.
- Evidence that our consultation activities reflect the diversity of our communities and that we work with tenants we don't usually hear from.
- Increased participation through online engagement.
- Customer engagement is a key training priority for all housing staff to ensure everyone plays a role in listening to our tenants and implementing change.
- Evidence that the views of young people have contributed to the development of our services.

3. Making decisions with our tenants

We will ensure the results of customer engagement are used to develop services and bring about positive change. We will use customer insight to make improvements and shape what we do and how we do it. We value the contribution tenants make in improving services and will ensure we provide feedback each time a contribution is made. We will involve our tenants to ensure their homes are safe and decent.

How will we do this?

- We will use the results of customer engagement to make decisions about our services and their communities.
- We will provide feedback on what we have done to improve services and bring about positive change as a direct result of customer engagement.
- We will involve our tenants with the maintenance, safety and energy efficiency of their homes.
- We will create health and safety and fire safety champions in local communities and provide our tenants with the right training and support to undertake these roles.
- We will empower our tenants to make decisions and take the lead.
- We will engage with the tenants of our new build homes and use their feedback to inform our future designs and choice of products.
- We will ensure our tenants can make a positive contribute to their health and well-being and tackle poverty and exclusion.



How will we know we have been successful?

- Increased satisfaction in housing services.
- Evidence that customer engagement has been used to make decisions and shape services.
- Evidence that tenants have been empowered to make a positive contribution to the maintenance, safety and energy efficiency of their homes.
- Fire safety checks are carried out regularly with tenants.
- Evidence that tenant's views have informed our future designs and choice of products.

4. Maximising scrutiny and accountability

We will build trust and transparency and ensure our tenants can hold us to account. We will ensure our Council Members can provide scrutiny of our decisions to ensure our tenants have been involved and listened to. We will work with our partners to get a better understanding of how we can engage with and support our communities. We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.

How will we do this?

- We will explore opportunities for wider tenant involvement, which can form a bridge between local communities and housing services.
- We will use our tenant's panel to provide scrutiny and challenge and ensure that decisions that will affect our tenants are transparent.





- We will publish our performance on our website on a regular basis so that tenants can see how we are measuring up and improving.
- Key decisions about our services will be made by Council Members and the results of customer engagement and involvement will form the basis of any recommendations. Equality impact assessments will help us understand any adverse effects on the decisions we make.
- We will ensure tenants understand the level of service they can expect from us and what to do if they don't think we are meeting it.
- We will ensure our tenants know how they can complain about our services and that complaints are given priority. We will thoroughly investigate all complaints and provide tenants with a full and honest response.
- We will put right what has gone wrong and ensure we learn from any mistakes, publishing the details of any improvements.
- We will engage with our colleagues and external organisations about how we can better engage and support our tenants.

How will we know we have been successful?

- Evidence of decisions made in consultation with our tenant's panel.
- Evidence of challenge and scrutiny by our Council Members.
- Evidence that key performance measures and how we compare with others are regularly published and communicated to our tenants. Evidence that performance has improved.
- Evidence that complaints are consistently resolved promptly, politely and fairly.
- Complaints about our service are reducing.
- Evidence that complaints about our services have been used to drive changes and improvements.



Measuring and Monitoring

Effective monitoring and reporting of this strategy will help us understand if our engagement activities are making a difference. Therefore, we will measure and report on the effectiveness of this strategy by doing the following:

- We will expect to see an increase in the number of our tenants becoming involved and influencing decision making. We will measure and report on this through our website, our tenant's panel, Housing Connect magazine and an annual report to our tenants.
- We will evaluate the progress of engagement activities at regular intervals throughout the year to ensure these are working effectively.
- We will publish the details of customer engagement opportunities through an annual plan, regularly reporting on how we are progressing.
- We will publish the records of meetings and decisions made.
- We will provide an annual report to the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on progress against our strategy.
- We will ensure customer engagement forms a core competency for housing staff and is reflected in all job roles, recruitment processes and training plans.

“We want to hear your views on the service we provide and encourage more people to get involved with the tenants panel.”

Matthew Hufford
Communications and
Engagement Co-ordinator.

Contact one of our Customer
Engagement Officers today

Call:
01325 405333

Contact on Facebook:
Darlington Borough Council Housing

Email:
customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk



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