



Tenant Participation & Community Involvement Strategy

2023 - 2026

Foreword

We are pleased to introduce our tenant participation & community involvement strategy which sets out how we will involve tenants and service users in shaping, improving, and changing the services that we deliver.

The Board and staff of Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing Association are very keen to encourage our tenants and service users to take an interest in the work that we do. The reason for this, is that we strongly believe one of the most effective ways of improving services, is to provide more opportunities to become actively involved in a meaningful way.

This three-year strategy sets out our ideas and aspirations in regards tenant participation. It establishes a robust tenant involvement framework that will allow you to become involved in our business at whatever level you wish. Involvement can be as much as providing feedback to our regular satisfaction surveys, or by becoming more involved in your local residents' association. You may wish to register with us to be consulted on a new policy which may affect you, or you may simply just wish to have more opportunity to express your opinion or to know how to provide us with ideas for improvement. This strategy clearly sets out those channels that will open to you, and reiterates our commitment to always welcome your views and ideas.

If you are open to registering your interest with us, or wish to discuss how you would like to become more involved in the work that we do, we would be very keen to hear from you. Please get in touch and let us know your thoughts. Even the smallest idea could help improve our services.

Background

Since its formation, Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing has welcomed the views of its tenants as a service improvement tool.

However, we recognise that we need to do more. Therefore, we hope that by setting out specific objectives within this strategy, and by committing the necessary resources, that we will be able to achieve our ambition to have tenants and service users at the heart of policy development and service delivery.

The Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland

In early 2016, the Department for Social Development, (now Department for Communities – DfC), launched their Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland.

A copy of the DfC Strategy can be found at the link below:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/tenant-participation-strategy-northern-ireland-2015-2020>

or by contacting Department for Communities directly on:

Department for Communities
Lighthouse Building
1 Cromac Place
Gasworks Business P
Woodvale & Shankill Community
Ormeau Road
BELFAST
BT7 2JB

Telephone: 028 9082 9000

This government strategy provides guidance to all social housing providers in respect to how we deliver our model of participation, and provides clear and unambiguous information to the public about what kind of involvement they should expect from their social housing provider.

Ultimately the Strategy for Northern Ireland aims to improve the quality of social housing services for social housing tenants and landlords right across Northern Ireland and we hope that Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing's Tenant Participation Strategy 2023 – 2026 will help support and contribute to that wider ambition.

Introduction

We recognise that better engagement and open channels for participation will lead to better service delivery. This we hope will help us realise another of our key objective: *To deliver excellent service levels.*

What are the aims and objectives of this strategy?

The **aims** of this strategy are:

- To set out our approach to tenant involvement including the reasons why we seek to involve tenants;
- To ensure that tenants are actively and meaningfully involved in our business;
- To set out ways in which we will enable and encourage tenants to be involved and demonstrate that tenants are part of the review and continual improvement process.

The **objectives** of this strategy are:

- To enhance participation, communication and consultation through the development of new tenant structures, innovative systems and effective processes;
- To ensure that tenant involvement is central to the operation of the Association;
- To establish and support links between tenants and organisations working in the wider community and to promote and enhance community cohesion;

How will we achieve our strategic aims and objectives?

In order to achieve the strategic aims and objectives of this strategy we:

- Have developed an action plan which sets out key milestones to be delivered over three years from April 2023 to March 2026;
- Will regularly monitor, review, update and report on the strategy and associated action plan;
- Have committed the necessary resources to deliver the strategy;

Our Proposals

Our strategy offers tenants and service users participation at four different “tiers” or levels.

Level 1: Information & Communication

Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing provides tenants with regular, timely & up to date information on service standards, tenant satisfaction results, latest news, and on all matters which relate to the services we deliver.

This is done through a number of ways including residents meetings within sheltered housing schemes, through our website, through our bi-annual news letter, through our annual report and through intermittent mail shots, personal letters and face to face meetings with staff.

We will continue to provide this information through those traditional means, but we also aim to enhance communication through the introduction of new technology and processes to include, email, text messaging and smart phone applications, as well as a greater use of social media such as facebook and twitter.

Tenant Influence

Just by being interested in what we do and how we perform, and by communicating with us when we get things wrong or to tell us when we get things right, our tenants can provide the platform that influences and enables us to improve. By responding to our annual survey for example, will give us a steer on how to make improvements.

Tenant Commitment

Level 1 participation does not involve a great deal of commitment. We would ask that you take the time to:

- Respond to our customer service surveys and consultations;
- Attend tenant meetings where possible;
- Keep Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing up to date with your email, text, and personal details to facilitate automated communication;
- Follow us on social media;

Tenant Benefits

You will help deliver service improvement;

You will help us meet your needs through communication and information that is available when you need it;

You will help us meet our environmental goals in the production of less waste paper;

You will help us achieve value for money and in return keep rents and services charges low.

Level 2: Group Structure

Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing is keen to support the establishment of as many group structures amongst its tenants as possible, as these can bring greater tenant influence in the shaping of service delivery.

Therefore, over the lifetime of this strategy we aim to establish or support the development of tenants' associations or groups.

Formal tenant structures when properly constituted can not only have a greater impact on influencing service delivery, but can also impact positively on the broader community as well as enhance personal organisational skills.

Many group structures attract finance through grants and other means, and Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing is committed to providing any formal group of its tenants with training & financial support to get up and running and will also ensure there is a direct link back to the organisation through the group.

Tenant Influence

By being involved as a group or formal entity, tenants can have a much greater say in how we deliver and improve our services.

Groups also tend to have a greater influence in the improvement of their scheme services and can have a more direct link to the landlord.

Tenant Commitment

Level 2 participation does involve a greater deal of commitment from tenants to enable the group to flourish, and the commitment would extend to:

- Being involved in organising regular meetings;
- Being involved in organising community activities;
- Attending group meetings where applicable;
- Representing tenants at Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing service focus groups and other such events;

Tenant Benefits

Through a group structure such as a tenants' association you will:

- Feel more involved;
- Feel more empowered;
- Make a positive impact locally for you and your neighbours;
- Help improve community cohesion;

Level 3: Formal Tenant Based Committee

In addition to the establishment of local group structures in the shape of tenant associations or groups, Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing is keen to support the establishment of a broader formal group such as a tenant's committee who can scrutinise our performance, be involved in policy development, and who can lead on initiatives to improve our organisation for the betterment of all its tenants.

Therefore, over the lifetime of this strategy we aim to establish or support the development of, a Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing Tenant's Committee, a formal tenant based group.

Tenant Influence

Tenant's forums can have a significant impact and influence on an organisation's strategy and direction if properly constituted, managed and supported.

To this end we are committed to ensuring that sufficient resources are put in place to support this aim.

Tenant Commitment

Level 3 participation involves a greater deal of commitment. This extends to:

- Being involved in regular meetings;
- Being involved in reviewing policy and providing feedback;
- Attending meetings with the Association;
- Reporting back to tenants on certain issues;

Tenant Benefits

Through more formal group structures, tenants can;

- Hold their landlord to account for their performance;
- Hold their landlord to account for their conduct;
- Hold their landlord to account for their decisions;
- Help drive value for money and in return lower rents;

Level 4: Governance Structures

Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing is Governed by a Board of 8 to 12 individuals who volunteer their time in the interests of meeting housing need, strengthening communities and enhancing social justice.

In line with the rules of association that govern our Board structure, Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing is continually seeking to broaden its skills at Board level, and therefore over the lifetime of this strategy we aim to continue to support the presence of a Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing Tenant on the Association's Board.

Tenant Influence

A tenant who is a full member of a management board has a primary duty to the housing association. They must make decisions with that in mind. This sometimes restricts their role as a representative of tenants.

It is important that everyone recognises the potential for conflict in these situations and respects the difficulties that it may cause individuals.

Tenant Commitment

Board member's would be required to commit to:

- At least 6 Board meetings annually;
- Up to 2 days per annum for reviewing strategy;
- 2 to 4 days per year training & conferencing;
- Up to 4 committee meetings per year;

Tenant Benefits

Tenant involvement in the management structure of housing associations can play an important part in successful tenant participation. The benefits of having tenants on management boards include:

- Enabling tenants to be involved in the making of decisions that will affect their homes and environment;
- Enabling management board members, staff and tenants to work together towards a common goal;
- Providing a better understanding between board members and tenants;
- Making the board more accountable;
- Helping the landlord to obtain the views of tenants on policy issues and service delivery;
- Enabling tenants to influence the policies and practices that affect the way their homes are managed.

Supporting Tenant Involvement and Committing Resources

We recognise that in order for our tenants to participate fully in our organisation, active capacity building and group & individual development through training may be required.

We will attempt to keep tenants well informed and provide opportunities for such training, and will encourage them to access resources available to them through external organisations.

Our employees are committed to tenant involvement and significant resourcing has been committed by the organisation in terms of staff time and finance.

Our employees will attend tenant group meetings where invited and will support the participation of groups and individuals within their roles.

Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing has an annual budget set aside for tenant involvement activities, running April to March. The details of the tenant involvement budget is presented to and agreed with our Board in advance of the year ahead.

Tenant associations will be afforded a nominal amount each year for support and training and can access this money by applying to Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing directly.

Each group should prepare a plan assessing their financial needs for the coming year and submit this to us for assessment as part of their annual review and planning process. We will help support any group where required in order to do this.

Tenant groups which are not established can also be supported by us from the tenant participation budget as they go through the process of establishing themselves.

We will support individuals through relevant training opportunities and helping with other costs which contribute to our tenant involvement aims.

We will help develop links and networks with relevant local resource agencies to help tenants and tenants' groups with additional needs.

Our tenant involvement budget is funded primarily through rents and other income received, however, additional fundraising for events and activities may be generated across the year by tenant groups.

The budget will include funding for:

- Regular training for tenants, staff and Board members;
- Hiring meeting rooms;
- Travel, childcare and carer's expenses;
- Refreshments, raffle prizes and some social events;
- Attendance at conferences;

Within the budget will be amounts set aside for use by the groups recognised by Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing. These will be based on the groups' estimate of their annual expenses in accordance with the aims of each group.

We will also make available staff time and administrative/office facilities to support and encourage tenant involvement.

Other sources of reference and good practice for Tenant Participation:

Supporting Communities NI

34-36 Henry Street

Ballymena

BT43 5PS

Tel. 028 25645676

Email: info@supportingcommunitiesni.org

Monitoring and Evaluation

Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing will monitor and evaluate the delivery of this Tenant Participation Strategy by:

- The Director of Operations reporting on the progress of the Tenant Participation Strategy action plan to the Board on a quarterly basis;
- Recording all tenant involvement and providing regular feedback to tenants and Board to ensure that we are continually evaluating the effectiveness and value for money of our involvement opportunities;
- Reviewing the progress of the action plan at tenant meetings;
- Reviewing the strategy quarterly at the Senior Management Team meetings;
- By keeping records of consultations, attendance and involvement activities and reviewing these on a regular basis to ensure a broad range of Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing's tenants have been represented.

What tenants can do if they are not happy about how the Tenant Participation Strategy is implemented

Tenants can...

- ask that their concern is included on the agenda of any recognised tenant group;
- raise their concern whilst responding both directly or indirectly to satisfaction surveys or feedback requests either online, via text or telephone, letter or questionnaire;
- raise their concern directly with Woodvale & Shankill Community Housing's management;
- use our complaints procedure.

Equal Opportunities Statement

We value involvement that reflects the whole of our tenant population. To this end, we actively seek to remove barriers to participation arising from people with:

- different religious beliefs,
- people of different political opinion,
- people of different racial groups,
- people of different ages,
- people of different marital status,
- people of different sexual orientation,
- men and women generally,
- people with a disability and people without,
- and people with dependents and people without.

We aim to ensure that our involvement opportunities are accessible, that our written material is clear and easy to understand, and that we do not present any other barriers to involvement.

We will provide information for tenants in other languages and formats such as audio or large print where tenants need it.

We will provide information in ways that are easy to understand for tenants with limited or no reading skills where tenants need it.

All our tenant groups will recognise the importance of equal opportunities and seek to involve all those who are eligible to join them.