



North Tyneside Council

North Tyneside  
**HOMES**

# North Tyneside Homes

## Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Strategy 2012-15

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2009 tenants and North Tyneside Homes (NTH) agreed a tenant and leaseholder strategy and compact which set out NTH's commitment to put tenants at the heart of everything we do and support tenants to get involved in a wide range of ways.

It is now time to reflect on what we have achieved and update the strategy so that we continue to improve tenant and leaseholder involvement and meet our legal requirements.

## **2. How the strategy has been developed**

This new strategy is based on the views and priorities of the tenants and residents who have been involved in events and activities over the last 3 years. It has been developed with tenants on the involvement service development group and we have consulted widely on the draft with tenants and leaseholders, councillors and the community and voluntary sector. All the views expressed have been taken into account in the final document.

## **3. What does the strategy cover?**

This strategy covers involvement work carried out by North Tyneside Homes and all those who work on our behalf. We will work closely with other sections of the council and other organisations delivering services to our customers to make sure the needs and issues of our customers are understood.

Where the term tenant is mentioned throughout this document it means tenants and leaseholders.

## **4. Why is tenant involvement important?**

Tenant involvement is essential to tenants and North Tyneside Homes because:

- It helps us to understand the services tenants need and how they want them delivered
- It enables tenants to help shape services and set the standards they expect
- It means that it will help us make good decisions and use resources wisely on the services tenants want and use
- It is a legal requirement – we have a responsibility to consult with tenants about housing management matters that may substantially affect the way their home is managed. We also have a legal responsibility to consult with leaseholders about any work on their home that costs £250 or more. Leaseholders also have the right to be consulted before North Tyneside

Council enters into any long-term partnership with other organisation or company (if the arrangement affects leaseholders).

## 5. The national and local context

This strategy is influenced by the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England 2012 which sets out the standards that all social landlords are expected to meet. The regulatory framework was introduced as part of the Localism Act 2012 which aims to move power and responsibility for services from central and local government to communities and individuals. This framework requires landlords to support tenants to both shape and scrutinise service delivery and hold them to account for meeting the standards.

Locally, the Council and its partners are working to increase the role people can play in shaping the decisions that affect their lives through the Sustainable Communities Strategy (2010-2013) and other council plans. The Council's engagement strategy aims to ensure that this happens and co-ordinate involvement activity across the borough.

This strategy sits within the overall Council Engagement Strategy and North Tyneside Homes will continue to play an active role in the council's wider engagement activities.

The strategy also helps North Tyneside Homes achieve its vision to provide quality homes, excellent services, strong communities by:

- Being well governed and financially viable
- Running ourselves well
- Providing excellent services, homes and neighbourhoods
- Working well with others
- Being an employer of choice

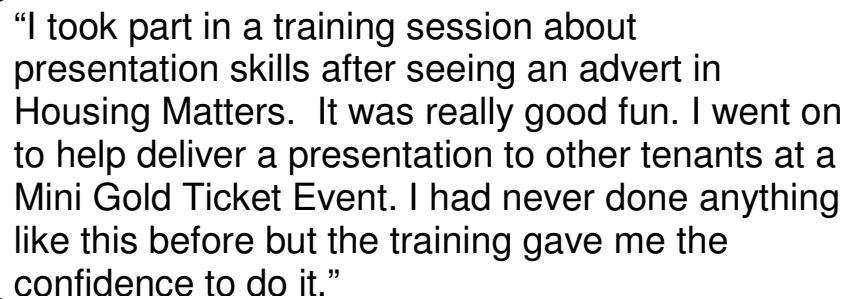
### How the strategy fits



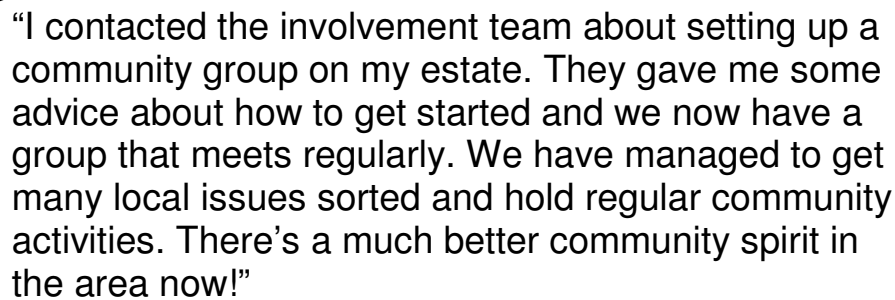
## 6. Where we are now?

Over the last 4 years we have been on a journey to improve resident involvement. We have moved rapidly from having a few people involved in a limited number of ways to having a wide menu of involvement activities through which we engaged over 2000 customers last year.

The number of tenants regularly involved has increased from around 24 to over 100 tenants and leaseholders who are now helping to improve services on a regular basis. Tenants are also supported to make the most of this involvement through a comprehensive tenant training programme. Last year over 200 training places were taken by tenants on 20 different courses.



“I took part in a training session about presentation skills after seeing an advert in Housing Matters. It was really good fun. I went on to help deliver a presentation to other tenants at a Mini Gold Ticket Event. I had never done anything like this before but the training gave me the confidence to do it.”



“I contacted the involvement team about setting up a community group on my estate. They gave me some advice about how to get started and we now have a group that meets regularly. We have managed to get many local issues sorted and hold regular community activities. There’s a much better community spirit in the area now!”

## 7. What has tenant involvement achieved?

Opportunities for tenants to influence NTH housing services has increased considerably since the last compact and strategy was drawn up in 2009.

Tenants’ views and suggestions for improving services are collected on a regular basis through a wide range of well attended events and activities.

These views and ideas are fed into tenant led service development groups that meet regularly to monitor the different parts of the housing service, discuss with managers areas of under-performance and identify improvements. Improvement ideas are then fed back to all tenants so that they can see the difference they are making.

This involvement has resulted in new services, improved policies and challenging service standards and targets including:

- The introduction of new a Victim Support Officer and the Handyperson scheme for older and disabled tenants
- Improved policies covering repairs and anti-social behaviour
- Tighter timescales for carrying out repairs
- Service standards and challenging targets for all key areas of service
- Improved choices for tenants undergoing improvement work
- Introduction of on-line rent statements and anti social behaviour reporting
- Over £400,000 of Better Estates funding on schemes to improve the environment on estates decided by tenants
- 7 local offers setting out specific service improvements to meet tenants' priorities
- Shortlisted for three national awards

All of these have been achieved whilst reducing the cost of the service by moving from 7 involvement officers in 2008/09 to 3 in 2012/13. When compared with other housing organisations the service is now low cost and high performing.

### **Our shared vision**

The vision for tenant involvement that we have agreed with tenants is:

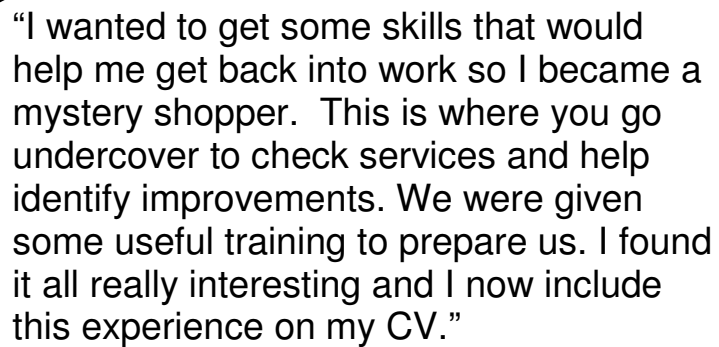
**'Happy tenants who are listened to and fully involved in decisions that result in well run, comfortable homes and pleasant neighbourhoods'**

We have also agreed the following principles of good involvement:

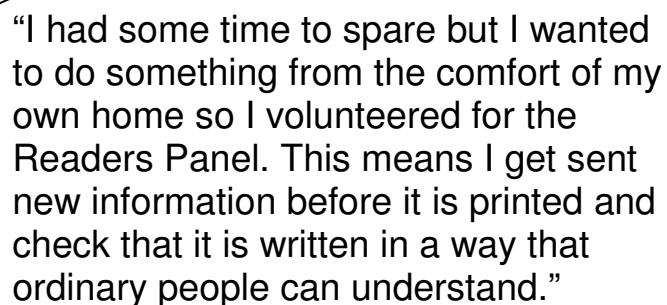
- Making sure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in improving housing services
- Being clear, honest and open about proposals, who may be affected, what is open to influence and the timescale for responses
- Making sure your involvement is timely, at a stage when views can influence and shape decisions
- At the start of any involvement we will make sure we tell you who will be making the final decision and when you can expect feedback on how your views have been taken into account
- After the involvement making sure we will tell you how your involvement has affected decision-making
- If we have not been able to act on your views, we will let you know why

We involve people through:

- Providing information
- Consultation
- Deciding together
- Enabling tenants to take control



“I wanted to get some skills that would help me get back into work so I became a mystery shopper. This is where you go undercover to check services and help identify improvements. We were given some useful training to prepare us. I found it all really interesting and I now include this experience on my CV.”



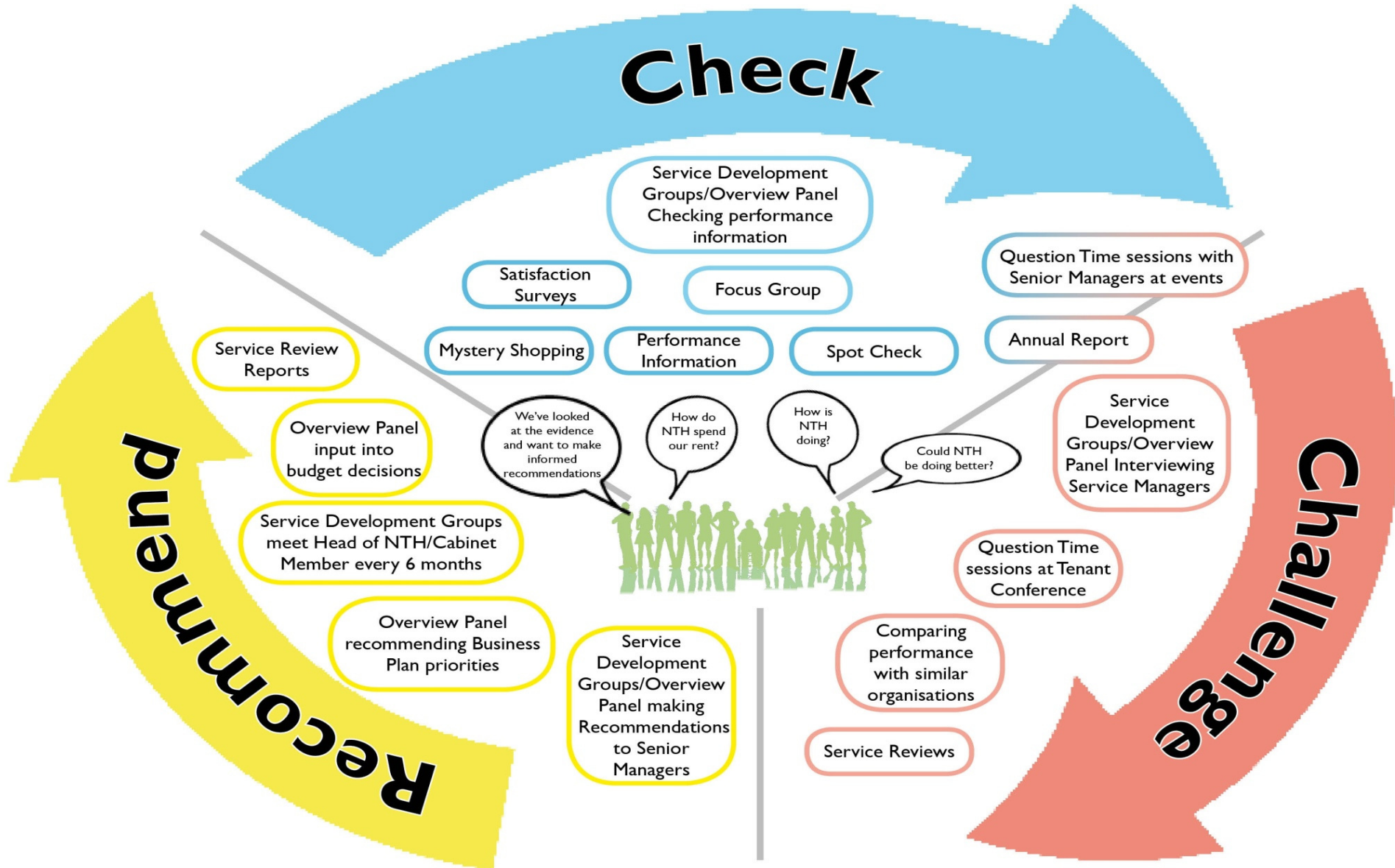
“I had some time to spare but I wanted to do something from the comfort of my own home so I volunteered for the Readers Panel. This means I get sent new information before it is printed and check that it is written in a way that ordinary people can understand.”

The diagram below shows our involvement structure



## Tenant scrutiny

Over the last year we have also introduced tenant scrutiny into our involvement structures. Tenant scrutiny is about tenants holding us to account for the services they receive and how their rent is spent. It is a key strand of the regulatory framework. The diagram below shows how tenant scrutiny is organised within North Tyneside Homes.





“I went along to a Gold Ticket Event and talked to the NTH Involvement team about opportunities to get involved. As a result I got involved in the Repairs SDG and have just taken part in the review of the empty homes standard. We have made some recommendations for improving the standard most of which are being acted on by NTH.”

“I took part in an estate walkabout with other tenants and my local housing officers. We identified a parking problem and applied to the environmental fund for new bays to be put in to solve the issue”

## **8. How can we improve?**

We have identified how we need to build upon the achievements we have made and improve involvement further through the following ways:

- We carried out an involvement impact assessment with tenants on the involvement service development group. This highlighted a number of recommendations for improving the effectiveness and value for money of involvement activities.
- Our equality impact check helped us to identify possible barriers to people getting involved and identify steps we can take to minimise these
- We used information about how our involvement work compares with other housing organisations in terms of costs and quality.
- We looked at tenant satisfaction with our services identified through the last tenants' survey, the involved tenants survey and feedback from our events.

## What this has told us:

- **Some involvement activities are not as effective as they could be.** Our impact assessment found that it was not clear what estate walkabouts were achieving. The assessment also found that we do not make enough use of the readers' panel and focus groups to gain views of a wider range of tenants. Mystery shopping should be used more as part of tenant scrutiny and we know that there are issues with the attendance at some Area Housing Forums and their effectiveness as a result.
- **We need to widen the profile of those getting involved.** We know from looking at the profile of who is taking part in involvement activities that tenants under the age of 45 are under-represented. We already take a number of steps to encourage this involvement by for example offering help with childcare and holding meetings at different times. However we need to do more to reach out to younger tenants in the year ahead.
- **We need to develop tenant scrutiny further.** We have made good progress by introducing tenant scrutiny into service development groups, our tenants' events and annual report. Two tenant led service reviews have also been carried out and recommendations for improvements identified and agreed by the Cabinet member and senior managers. However we need to improve the information and training for tenants carrying out scrutiny and introduce opportunities for armchair scrutiny.
- **We don't always feedback effectively the difference that involvement can make.** Our surveys have shown us that we need to improve the way we publicise involvement activities and how they have helped improve services.
- **We need to improve the way we work with others to widen involvement.** We know that other organisations, particularly community and voluntary organisations will be in contact with tenants who do not come along to our involvement activities. If we are to widen involvement we need to develop opportunities for co-operation and joint working so that we maximise the numbers of tenants who are able to give their views.

## 9. What we want to do next:

'By 2015 it should be clear to all tenants, councillors and everyone who works for North Tyneside Homes how tenant involvement and scrutiny is helping to improve housing services and hold NTH to account. '

(Involvement Group)

The outcomes we want to achieve from this strategy are as follows:

**Improved housing services, higher levels of customer satisfaction and better value for money by:**

- Providing a wide range of involvement activities that involve a diverse range of customers
- Offering training and other support to develop skills and help tenants make the most of their involvement opportunities
- Giving all tenants the opportunity to give and receive feedback and ensure that all staff encourage them to do so
- Enabling tenants to set priorities for the organisation and influence big and small decisions
- Embedding effective tenant scrutiny so that tenants are holding us to account for the services they receive
- Increasing the numbers of younger tenants involved
- Ensuring all NTH staff using every opportunity to involve tenants
- Developing effective working relationships with partner organisations that help us widen involvement and reach out to those seldom heard
- Targeting resources at services that meet customers' needs and priorities

Some key performance measures will be developed to measure our success as outlined in section 11.

## 10. Key milestones over next 3 years

### Year One (by March 2013)

- **Increase the involvement of younger tenants:** through a programme of targeted activities delivered in partnership with Children's Centres and through an on-line involvement activity.
- **Improve the tenant training programme:** through better promotion; linking sessions to employment skills and celebrating tenant achievements
- **Deliver a programme of tenant events:** to gain the views and give feedback to a wider group of tenants; increase opportunities for tenant scrutiny and further develop our work with a range of partners
- **Develop a process for involving tenants in budget priorities:** to increase tenant influence over the big decisions
- **Implement the recommendation of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny report on Kier North Tyneside (KNT):** by establishing arrangements for tenant involvement in the governance of KNT
- **Carry out two more tenant led service reviews:** to embed tenant scrutiny further
- **Promote the new involvement strategy with all NTH staff:** to make sure all staff encourage tenants to get involved

### Year 2 (by March 2014)

- **Implement on-line opportunities for tenant scrutiny:** through a dedicated section of the NTH website that invites question and challenge about performance and promotes the outcomes of scrutiny.
- **Introduce tenant inspectors:** to further embed scrutiny within NTH
- **Carry out two tenant led service reviews** as part of tenant scrutiny
- **Identify a programme of targeted activities** that effectively involve those seldom heard and widen the profile of those regularly involved

## **Year 3 (by March 2015)**

- **Demonstrate the effective involvement of those seldom heard** by delivering a range of targeted activities with clear outcomes
- **Deliver a full range of independent tenant scrutiny activities** with clear service improvement outcomes
- **Achieve external accreditation** for tenant & leaseholder involvement in North Tyneside

### **11. Measuring our success**

An action plan will be developed with tenants to deliver these milestones. These will include some key performance measures that will help track our progress including:

% of tenants under 45 who get involved

% of tenants satisfied that their views are taken into account

% of involved tenants who are satisfied with their involvement opportunities

The number of tenant led service reviews and % of recommendations implemented

% of involved tenants who have completed the core training within personal training plans

### **12. Monitoring our success**

This strategy will be regularly monitored to check the progress we are making in achieving our vision and key milestones for improving tenant involvement in North Tyneside Homes.

Tenants will continually monitor the strategy and meet with North Tyneside Homes on a three monthly basis to discuss the progress made.

A regular report on progress against the milestones will be made to the senior management team within North Tyneside Homes and discussed with the Cabinet Member for Housing. A summary of progress will also be reported through our newsletter 'Housing Matters' and on our website.

### **13. Reviewing the strategy**

A full review of this strategy will take place in March 2015. However it is a living document and will be amended as necessary with tenants as part of the quarterly monitoring process.