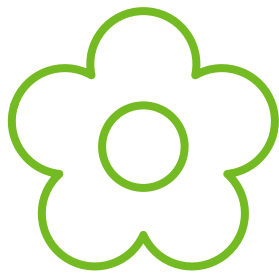
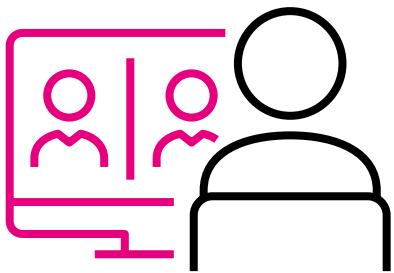


# COMMUNITY INFLUENCE & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

## 2024-2029



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# 1. FOREWORD

We are pleased to present the City Housing Community Influence & Engagement Strategy, which sets out how we plan to involve you, our residents, to make sure you can access, influence and scrutinise the services we deliver.

We are pleased that our corporate strategic participation principles 'Powered by People' underpin this strategy, setting out our clear vision and approach for engaging with residents and building on our Council priorities of putting citizens first.

This strategy has ultimately been shaped by resident voice, through discovery sessions, workshops, surveys, tenant talks, resident boards and more. Thank you to all the tenants, leaseholders, residents and members of the community, as well as representatives and stakeholder groups who have contributed their views and ideas.

Birmingham City Council is the largest Local Authority (LA) provider of social housing in the UK. We own and manage circa 59,000 homes, but we also provide important services to our tenants, leaseholders and households affected by homelessness.



**Cllr Jayne Francis**  
Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness



**Paul Langford**  
Strategic Director for City Housing

Whilst our tenants are very much integral to this strategy, we also extend this to include the broader community voice of residents who access services from City Housing.

This includes community groups, regeneration areas, targeted energy efficiency improvement and a raft of other strategic projects led by housing, that require positive engagement with residents and communities to enable effective delivery.

It is deeply saddening that a failure to act on critically important feedback or calls to action from social housing tenants, has led to tragedy in recent years. The death of Awaab Ishak and the Grenfell tragedy in 2017 are recent examples of residents not being listened to in a meaningful way. Across the sector, these tragic events have promoted a focus on issues of fire safety, damp & mould, social housing stigma, inequality, and lack of engagement; highlighting a need for change, a need to do better.

This is a journey of continuous improvement, with this strategy setting out the framework for how we'll put our communities at the heart of everything we do, working together to improve our services.

## 2. NATIONAL & LOCAL CONTEXT

In the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire disaster and the death of Awaab Ishak, Government policy, guidance and legislation have been strengthened to better protect households living in social housing. These changes place emphasis on increasing the safety of tenants and residents and a greater focus on giving tenants a meaningful voice, ensuring that landlords involve and

consult with you on issues and decisions that affect your homes, adopting a co-regulation approach.

The table below summarises some of the key policy changes that have been made to better protect you. Click on the headings for more information.

NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT	
<b><u>SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER 2020</u></b> Sets out the government's expectations for social housing providers and outlines 7 key priorities to ensure residents are safe, listened to and treated fairly.	
<b><u>FIRE SAFETY ACT 2021</u></b> Strengthens the Regulatory Reforms (fire safety) Order 2005 so beyond doubt the structure, external walls and flat entrance doors of multi-occupied residential buildings (such as tower blocks) are included within the scope of the Fire Safety Order. It requires that a responsible person includes these elements in their fire risk assessments.	<b><u>BUILDING SAFETY ACT 2022</u></b> Strengthens the Regulatory Reforms (fire safety) Order 2005 so beyond doubt the structure, external walls and flat entrance doors of multi-occupied residential buildings (such as tower blocks) are included within the scope of the Fire Safety Order. It requires that a responsible person includes these elements in their fire risk assessments.
<b><u>SOCIAL HOUSING (REGULATION) ACT 2023</u></b> Sets into law the reforms that were outlined in the Social Housing White Paper. It includes new rules for protecting tenants from serious hazards in their homes. The Act gives social housing tenants greater powers of scrutiny and it gives the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman more powers to regulate, intervene, carry out inspections and investigate tenant complaints.	
<b><u>THE REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING (RSH)</u></b> The RSH govern the social housing sector by setting standards for social landlords to achieve. Providers are expected to reach all standards and can be held accountable by their tenants and the Regulator for non-compliance if the standards are not being delivered. It includes Tenant Satisfaction Measures. <a href="#">Regulatory Standards</a>	<b><u>THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN</u></b> Investigates complaints and resolve disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords. They can instruct the landlord to take steps to put things right, to pay compensation or other remedies. They also have new powers to address issues wider than complaints, such as forcing landlords to review their own policies and practices, in order to prevent things going wrong in the future, which can lead to referrals to the RSH.
<b><u>TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES (TSM)</u></b> Are used to let tenants see how well their landlord is doing, and where improvements need to be made. TSMs are measured by a tenant perception survey to understand how satisfied you are with overall landlord performance, repairs, time taken to complete repairs, your home being safe and maintained and your views being listened to and acted upon.	

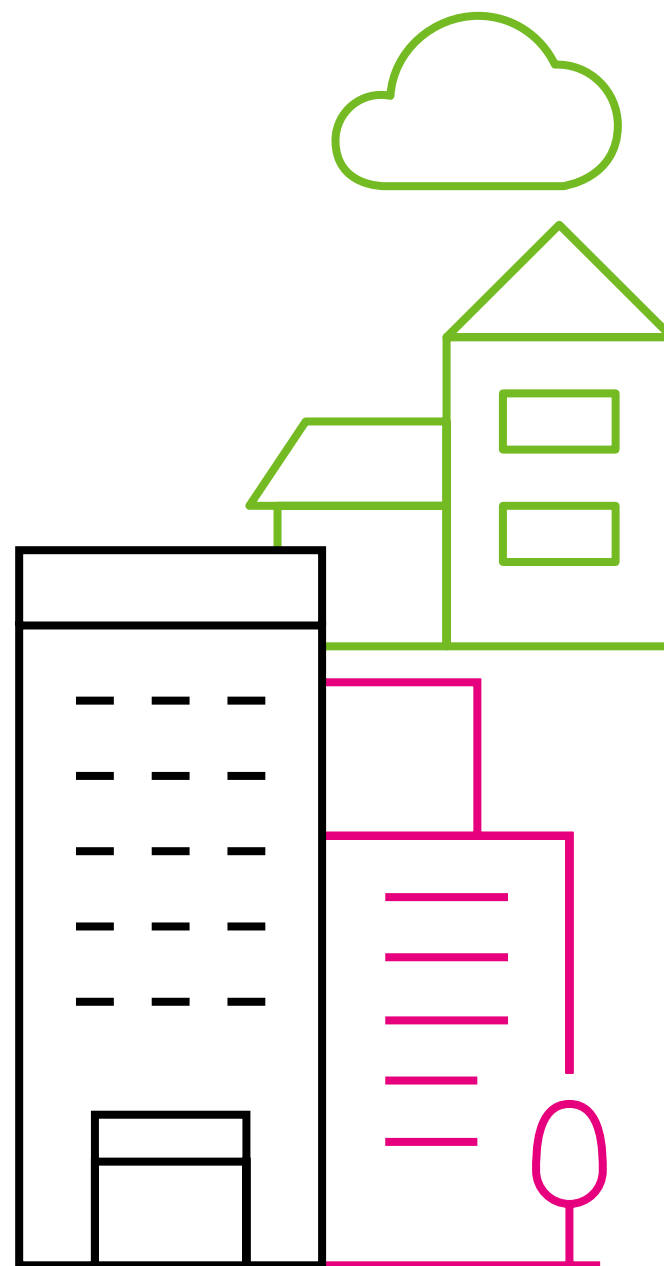
In response to this legislation, the Council has invested significantly in the safety of high-rise blocks, including a £33m programme of sprinkler installations, fire safety doors and other safety features. The Council have also improved governance around fire safety, ensuring 100% fire safety risk assessments have been completed in high-rise blocks and 95% in low-rise blocks.

Between 2017 and 2029, the Council invested in excess of £160m in fire safety improvements. The Council has developed a Building Safety Team to deliver the relevant legislative requirements across the housing portfolio, and to ensure that residents' concerns are heard and acted on appropriately, with safety in mind at all times.

The Council have faced challenges responding to the new regulatory environment, engaging formally with both the Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman on areas of concern. We have been transparent about improvements that need to be made and have made significant progress since being issued with a Regulatory Breach Notice in May 2023.

The Council has responded to Housing Ombudsman spotlight reports and is implementing a new Damp and Mould policy, to ensure that the lessons learned from this report are embedded as "business as usual" when dealing with damp and mould. The Council has also responded to the government consultation on the proposed 'Awaab's Law,' confirming our commitment to ensuring that we are appropriately resourced and funded to meet the challenging targets set within the proposals.

We want residents to know that we take your safety very seriously. Our aim is to make sure we're meeting the required standards, along with your expectations. Utilising the resources available to meaningfully change the lives of our citizens, with robust plans to ensure we're on the right track to achieving these.



## LOCAL POLICY & CONTEXT

### **HOUSING STRATEGY 2023- 2028**

Sets out our priorities to improve housing to achieve a: (1) Strong supply of affordable housing, (2) citizens can access & sustain the right home for them, (3) neighbourhoods are enhanced, and the quality of existing housing is improved.

### **ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-29**

Demonstrates our commitment to developing healthy communities, making sure you live in homes that are safe, warm and sustainable.

### **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN**

Details how we will make the necessary investment to deliver on our Asset Management Strategy – With over £1.5bn being invested from 2024-2032 to bring all Council homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.

### **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2024-2029**

Our approach to working with partners and residents to prevent homelessness so it is a rare occurrence, brief and non-recurring. The voices of those with lived experience of homelessness is central to this strategy.

### **PARAGRAPH 49 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN**

In Jan 2023 the Housing Ombudsman produced a special report into the Council's repairs, complaint handling & compensation performance. Improvements were put in place as a result, including a new complaints & compensation policy, IT and process changes in line with best practice models.

### **REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING REFERRAL**

The RSH carried out a separate inspection on the Council's compliance with the Consumer Standards and found the council to be in breach in 2 areas: These were the Home standard and the Tenant Involvement & Empowerment standard, which refer to our homes meeting decency standards across 6 areas, and failing to treat tenants with appropriate respect and measures to raise complaints with us.

### **POWERED BY PEOPLE FRAMEWORK**

The Council's corporate framework for public participation, is a representation of the Council's new aspirational and coordinated approach to public participation, which sets out our clear vision and approach for engaging citizens, building on best practise models and our Council priorities of putting citizens first.

### **BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL CUSTOMER CHARTER**

The Council's commitment to providing excellent customer service to everyone in Birmingham. This means putting citizens first. The Customer Charter will let you know what you can expect from the Council when receiving our services, and what we expect from you.

### **CORPORATE PLAN**

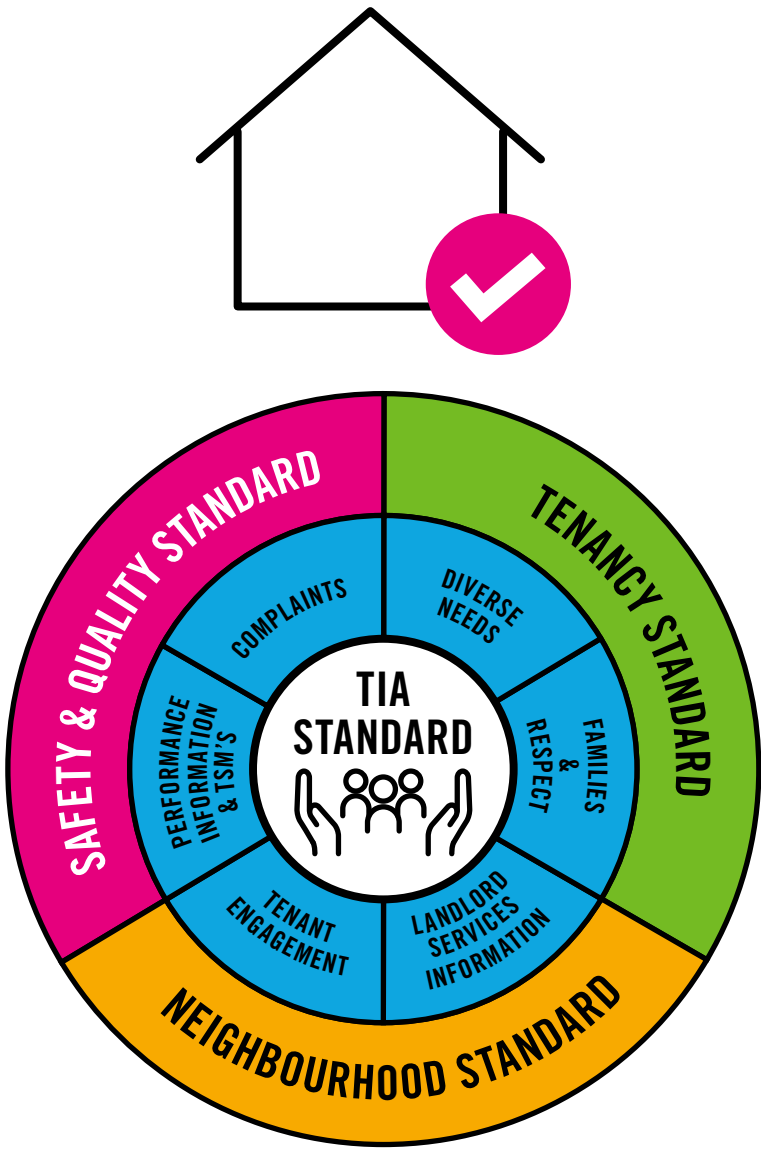
This Plan sets the basis for Birmingham City Council's strategic planning, and a focus on tackling inequalities and creating opportunities for citizens to live longer, healthier, and happier lives.

From April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing introduced new Consumer Standards and a Code of Practice for landlords to follow. These strengthen the accountability of landlords to their tenants and fulfil the obligations set out by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

### WHAT DO THE CONSUMER STANDARDS MEAN FOR TENANTS?

The Consumer Standards are designed to ensure we deliver the right outcomes for you. Where we do not meet these standards, you can hold us to account, and the Regulator of Social Housing can take enforcement action against the Council. These standards focus on 4 key areas:

THE SAFETY & QUALITY STANDARD
Landlords must provide safe and good-quality homes for their tenants. This standard includes up to date information on the condition of our housing stock, delivery of an effective repairs service and meeting decency standards.
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD STANDARD
The neighbourhood standard outlines expectations for landlords to collaborate & cooperate with other organisations, to create safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods where tenants feel secure in their homes. This includes how we tackle anti-social behaviour, hate incidents and Domestic Abuse.
THE TENANCY STANDARD
Outlines requirements for fair allocation and letting of homes by landlords. It covers aspects such as property allocation, tenancy management and mutual exchange for tenants.
THE TRANSPARENCY, INFLUENCE & ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARD (TIA'S)
Requires us to be open with tenants and treat you with fairness and respect, so you can access services, raise concerns when necessary, influence decision-making, and hold us to account.



## WHAT DO THE CONSUMER STANDARDS MEAN FOR TENANTS?

The Transparency, Influence & Accountability standard acts as a golden thread.

It brings delivery of the Consumer Standards together, placing you, your safety and voice at the heart of housing service delivery. Across each of the Consumer Standards is the requirement to ensure that residents know how/are able to: access our services, raise issues easily, scrutinise our strategies, policies and services, access reliable information about our performance, have their diverse needs considered and to be treated with fairness and respect.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM's) are an important part of this standard and form part of a scrutiny package, enabling both residents and the Regulator of Social Housing to measure our performance and hold us to account. Data is collected against 10 management performance measures and surveying of tenants for their views against 12 perception measures. These include being asked about how well we engage, listen, and respond to them.

Through this strategy we aim to increase resident involvement, satisfaction, and quality of life by improving services – whilst making better use of Council resources. We want to reassure our residents that we are not creating this strategy solely due to regulatory changes, but because it aligns to our core values and enables us to become the best at what we do.

## WHO IS THIS STRATEGY FOR?

Whilst this strategy rightly has a focus on residents living on social housing, owned and managed by Birmingham City Council, we want to adapt the principles across our communities as a whole. City Housing work with communities in multiple forms and this strategy is designed to ensure engagement is delivered in a consistent way:

- Tenants and leaseholders residing in Council properties
- Community stakeholder groups
- Communities affected by regeneration, particularly large projects like Ladywood and Druids Heath
- Households living in temporary accommodation
- Residents who are using the housing register
- Tenants, leaseholders, owner occupiers and private renters who are engaging with the Council around energy efficiency
- Private rented sector residents
- Households living in accommodation owned and managed by Housing Associations
- Residents living in supported or exempt accommodation





### 3. UNDERSTANDING OUR PERFORMANCE

While it is of the utmost importance that we as a Council have a clear and robust approach to community engagement, in order to achieve that, it is crucial to look at what efforts to engage already exist, so that we can understand how we’re currently working with you, what we need to change, and what we need to continue or do more of.

In this section, we summarise our review and share the learning from key areas of tenant and resident engagement.

#### TENANT PARTICIPATION ADVISORY SERVICE (TPAS)

To prepare for the Social Housing Regulation Act and to assess our engagement approach with residents, the Council commissioned a review in 2021 by TPAS (an industry expert). The review revealed that for many citizens, their experience with the Council, day to day was widely negative and there was a lack of trust which affected the opportunities for future re-engagement.

In response, the Council commissioned a project led by TPAS to ‘re-engineer’ engagement with tenants and leaseholders, looking to improve relationships and re-build trust. The approach also enabled the Council to engage with tenants and leaseholders who are more representative than the demographic make-up of the city.

Together, residents and staff sought to discover key themes that, if in place, would deliver opportunities for residents to influence service design and delivery, and hold the Council to account. This engagement project has been an essential tool for preparing the Council to meet the Transparency, Influence & Accountability standard.

The key recommendations of the TPAS review are laid out below:

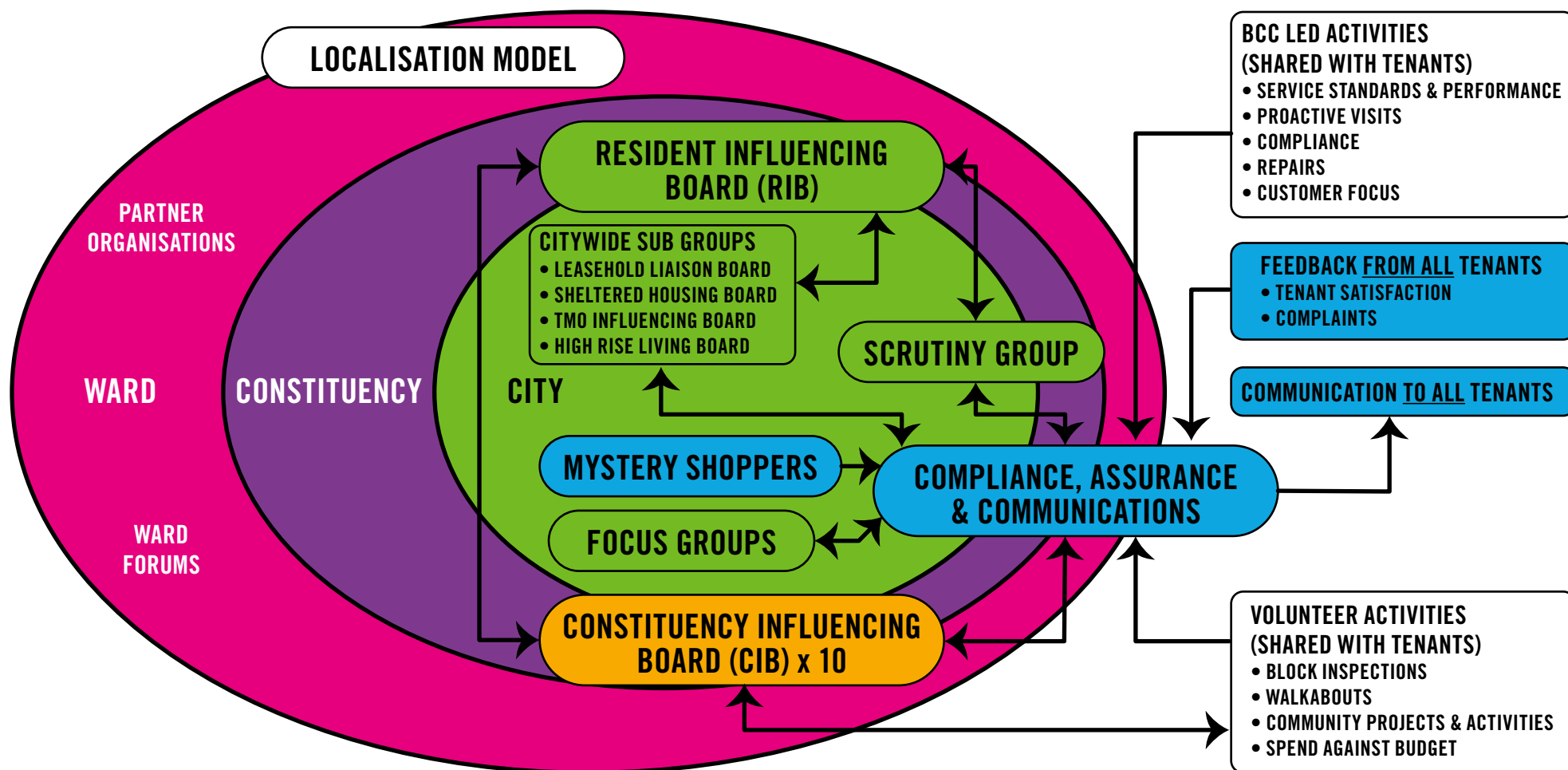
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	PROGRESS
Develop a Resident and Community Influencing Strategy with a supporting delivery plan	This document is a direct response to said recommendations, setting out precisely how we intend to gather our citizen’s views, as well as how these will influence and impact the organisation, services and communities.
Develop a framework to ensure ‘resident and community influence is a key part of service design, monitoring, scrutiny and delivery’	Corporate Framework for Public Participation ‘ <a href="#">Powered by People</a> ’ as well as an accompanying implementation guide, which sets out not only the Council’s aspirations for participation, but also how the framework will be embedded into practice across the organisation.
Implement a new Resident Influence and Assurance Board (RIB) as a fundamental part of the governance arrangements for housing management.	New involvement model adopted and implemented from April 2024, with broader city coverage and clear governance/mechanism for tenants to scrutinize and influence housing services.

## RESIDENT INFLUENCE & ASSURANCE BOARDS

In response to the recommendations made by TPAS, a new involvement model was introduced, which reorganised 29 ward-level housing liaison boards (HLB) into formal City Housing Involvement Boards (CHIB), who work directly with the Council to improve engagement levels across the city.

This board is attended by tenant and staff representatives from a number of groups, such as the senior leadership team, and the tenant scrutiny group.

This new engagement structure (as documented in the image below) integrates newly engaged tenants and leaseholders with those who were involved in previous groups, bringing together a representative group of individuals who are supporting the Council to improve their services, with fresh and innovative ideas.



## TENANT TALKS

Following a period of formal engagement with the Housing Ombudsman, the Council delivered a joint 'Meet the Ombudsman' event with the Housing Ombudsman in August 2023. During this event, we invited residents to share their experiences with the Council and the Ombudsman, informing service improvements.

The success of this initial event and the moving stories we heard from residents prompted the Council to set up 'tenant talks', providing them with direct access to senior representatives from Repairs, Housing Management and Housing Regeneration Project Teams to share their concerns, experiences and complaints. This enables residents to have their concerns addressed quickly but also gives the Council an opportunity to learn from the experiences of residents.

These talks have proven extremely popular with multiple events taking place across Birmingham. As a result, the Council has been able to formulate several responses aimed at making services more accessible and responsive, such as the creation of an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) tracker, which is designed to help citizens report issues more easily.

## POWERED BY THE PEOPLE 2023

The Council as a whole have developed an engagement framework, setting out how we engage with the people we serve more broadly. The Powered by the People Approach is vitally important in regaining a sense of trust, particularly given the Council's challenging financial situation and the subsequent questions this has brought up for members of the public. The Powered by the People framework adheres to several key principles, as set out below:

- Converse – Listen and connect with people.
- Inform – Tell people what is happening in ways that are accessible and easy to understand.
- Involve – Encourage others to provide insights, information and opinions.
- Consult – Offer ideas or options and respond to feedback.

- Collaborative- work together to jointly design and deliver interventions.
- Enable- people to shape where they live and the services they rely on.

## COMMUNITY ADVOCATE GROUPS

The Council have previously had an adversarial relationship with tenant advocacy groups, adopting an approach which could be deemed as defensive. Through the development of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028, housing services have offered an olive branch to advocacy groups and community organisations who support households living in or using our services.

We have listened to their concerns and have worked hard to re-set relationships. We recognise the vital knowledge that community groups have about resident's experiences of housing in the city and know that we can make powerful changes by working together.

The Council are working closely to develop delivery plans with several community groups, seeking to address areas of concern and where possible, looking to develop joint campaigns for change. We are currently working closely with:

- Birmingham Fair Housing Campaign (BFHC)
- Poverty Truth Commission
- Citizens UK
- Shelter

## IMPROVED COMMUNICATION METHODS

Good communication is pivotal to effective engagement, the Council has revised its communications strategy, maximizing how it reaches citizens, by utilising different media, the implement of software solutions such as the Northgate 'comms module' (automated text and email), as well as traditional newsletters (and annual report), provide residents with important news and updates from volunteers and staff, as well as information on local support and opportunities for engagement.

The communication team are also working on producing service standards for all relevant areas, but particularly those areas where residents have expressed through complaints, TSMs or other engagement mechanisms they would like to see

improvements. These will be provided in a mass communication, so that residents are aware of exactly what to expect from their landlord.

## TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES (TSMS)

TSMS are a way for the Regulator of Social Housing to assess how landlords are performing by enabling them to compare the perceptions of residents across the country. These became compulsory in April 2023 and the Council submitted their first year's perception surveys in June 2024, following an initial pilot in June 2022.

The purpose of this pilot was twofold. Firstly, it was designed to help prepare citizens and staff for an increase in regular interaction via surveys, given that they would become mandatory, and secondly it was also intended to give the Council a head start on identifying where some of the main service issues are and has enabled us to develop plans to address them.

The rich data the Council have been able to analyse from the collection of TSMS, has led to several operational changes; the implementation of CCTV, commissioning a review of older person's accommodation, improved quality assurance systems for repairs and maintenance and improved complaints performance to name just a few.



The table below sets out how the Council perform in comparison to other large urban authorities, aiming to achieve the overall national average of 60%:

MEASURE	TSM MID-YEAR NATIONAL	TSM MID-YEAR LARGE URBAN LA'S	BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL TSM
TP01: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH REPAIRS	72.3%	59.6%	<b>51.6%</b>
TP02: SATISFACTION WITH REPAIRS	76.2%	65.3%	<b>56.1%</b>
TP03: SATISFACTION WITH TIME TAKEN TO COMPLETE MOST RECENT REPAIR	72.5%	58.2%	<b>56.0%</b>
TP04: SATISFACTION THAT HOME IS WELL MAINTAINED	75.9%	60.7%	<b>52.0%</b>
TP05: SATISFACTION HOME IS SAFE	81.2%	68.2%	<b>65.0%</b>
TP06: SATISFACTION THAT THE LANDLORD LISTENS TO TENANT VIEWS AND ACTS UPON THEM	66.6%	48.5%	<b>47.0%</b>
TP07: SATISFACTION THAT THE LANDLORD KEEPS TENANTS INFORMED ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER TO THEM	74.7%	64.3%	<b>50.5%</b>
TP08: AGREEMENT THAT THE LANDLORD TREATS TENANTS FAIRLY AND WITH RESPECT	81.65	68.0%	<b>72.2%</b>
TP09: SATISFACTION WITH THE LANDLORD'S APPROACH TO HANDLING COMPLAINTS	38.1%	24.1%	<b>18.2%</b>
TP10: SATISFACTION THAT THE LANDLORD KEEPS COMMUNAL AREAS CLEAN AND WELL MAINTAINED	67.6%	57.6%	<b>47.4%</b>
TP11: SATISFACTION THAT THE LANDLORD MAKES A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO NEIGHBOURHOODS	69.2%	57.9%	<b>49.9%</b>
TP12: SATISFACTION WITH THE LANDLORD'S APPROACH TO HANDLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR	62.6%	54.5%	<b>47.0%</b>

It is clear that the Council aren't where we want to be in terms of tenant satisfaction. We know that tenant perceptions will have been affected by the negative feedback the Council have previously received, by both the Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing. We also know that the Council's financial position and the impact this may be causing members of the public, is also likely to have an impact on satisfaction.

Re-building our reputation and improving tenant's perceptions of the Council is a key objective of this strategy. We want to have a relationship with all residents across the city, that is built on trust and a belief that the Council will be there to serve the community when they need us.

## COMPLAINTS

Complaints offer not only an opportunity for citizens to voice their grievances and have problems resolved, but it is also an incredibly useful resource for the Council to understand where we are going wrong and can improve.

As such, it is of significant concern that satisfaction with the Council is consistently low in terms of complaints, as this could prevent people from engaging with us, and because it could be a sign that we are not learning from complaints.

This is why our complaints teams are now making extensive use of root cause analysis, whereby trends in complaints are analysed to see where services need to improve, which they are then informed of on a quarterly basis.

Similarly, the Housing Ombudsman team, use a 'lessons learned' tracker to record all incoming Ombudsman orders, so again the data can be used to inform service areas. This document is then shared with the Regulator and Ombudsman as evidence of taking actions forward.

The Council's Regulatory Breach Notice issued in May 2023, relates specifically to the management of complaints, a consequence of the Housing Ombudsman Paragraph 49 report published in January 2023 in relation to the Council's complaint handling approach. The Council have made significant progress since early 2023, reducing a historic backlog of unanswered complaints and trying to respond to residents more

quickly when complaints come in.

We know there is still some way to go but we are confident that the lessons we have learned through our work with the Regulator and Ombudsman are helping us to respond to complaints in a much more effective way. Our progress is summarised below:

	RECEIVED THIS MONTH				BACKLOG			
	COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	COMPLETED WITH (SLA) SERVICE-LEVEL AGREEMENT	SLA %	NUMBER INTO BACKLOG	TOTAL BACKLOG	DIFFERENCE	BACKLOG CASES CLOSED	ALL CASES CLOSED
FEB 23	768	258	34%	510	1598	-	317	575
MAR 23	996	448	46%	548	1641	43	330	778
APR 23	788	474	60%	314	1864	223	430	904
MAY 23	727	457	63%	270	1684	-180	357	814
JUN 23	616	374	61%	242	1520	-164	356	730
JUL 23	614	346	55%	268	1321	-199	354	700
AUG 23	657	374	57%	283	966	-355	324	698
SEP 23	531	343	65%	188	908	-58	260	603
OCT 23	594	273	45%	321	857	-51	382	655
NOV 23	641	369	58%	272	849	-8	339	708
DEC 23	468	279	60%	189	882	33	278	557
JAN 24	674	403	60%	271	913	31	135	538
FEB 24	577	339	60%	238	773	-140	235	574
MAR 24	554	373	68%	181	462	-311	353	726
APR 24	572	357	68%	215	267	-195	446	803
TOTAL	9777	5467	55%	4310			4896	10363

## PRIORITIZING BROADER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Council has reached out to the community, developing strategic projects in a co-designed way or helping them to benefit from initiatives that housing is leading on.

Making sure residents are informing our strategies and policies gives them a meaningful role in how our services are delivered, as well as giving them an opportunity to better understand their rights, opportunities for engagement or the support they might be eligible for.

A key commitment of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028 was to incorporate lived experience in every intervention we deliver as a housing service. Whilst there is work still to do to make sure this is embedded in the Council's culture, there has been significant progress over the last 12 months in re-building our relationship with the wider community.

- **Responding to the Cost-of-Living Crisis:** the Council produced a number of helpful advice guides such as money management, fuel poverty support, and benefit advice, in multiple different languages. Most meaningfully, the Council provided over 300 warm welcome hubs across the city, providing safe spaces for the community to gather, eat and learn and most importantly, stay warm.
- **Energy Support Scheme:** automated messaging and door knocking used to inform citizens of the pre-payment meter-top up scheme, which aimed to provide one off meter debt clearing for residents experiencing hardship. Further support was provided in the form of a free electricity meter top up, extended to every resident with communal heating, which has proven extremely successful, over 387 households have benefited.
- **Retrofit Awareness:** information sessions about the Council's retrofit scheme, whereby properties are altered in order to reduce the energy needed to occupy that building. Existing community groups are working closely with the Council to help raise awareness amongst communities and promote uptake of the opportunity.
- **Birmingham Housing Week:** designed to inform young people about career opportunities in the housing sector. A 'community conversation' was conducted, which brought together residents and stakeholders with experience of housing

development, acting as an opportunity to dive into the barriers citizens face when it comes to having a real say in the regeneration.

- **Community Regeneration:** the Council has not always engaged well with communities affected by regeneration, damaging relationships with the community and causing a lack of trust. We have worked closely with residents affected by regeneration in both Druids Heath and Ladywood. These communities and the Council worked together to produce a Community Charter which enshrined the Council's offer and commitments with regards to regeneration, including what can be expected in terms of communication moving forward.
- **Harmful Gambling in Social Housing research project:** a collaboration with The Centre for Personal Financial Wellbeing at Aston University and community partners, which involved a full programme of engagement, including a virtual round-table, targeted engagement, resident interviews, and focus groups with citizens and staff.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

Over the last 12 months particularly, and through our work with TPAS, the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman, the Council have begun to embed a culture of engagement, whereby consultation, communication and co-production with communities are considered as part of every new project and intervention.

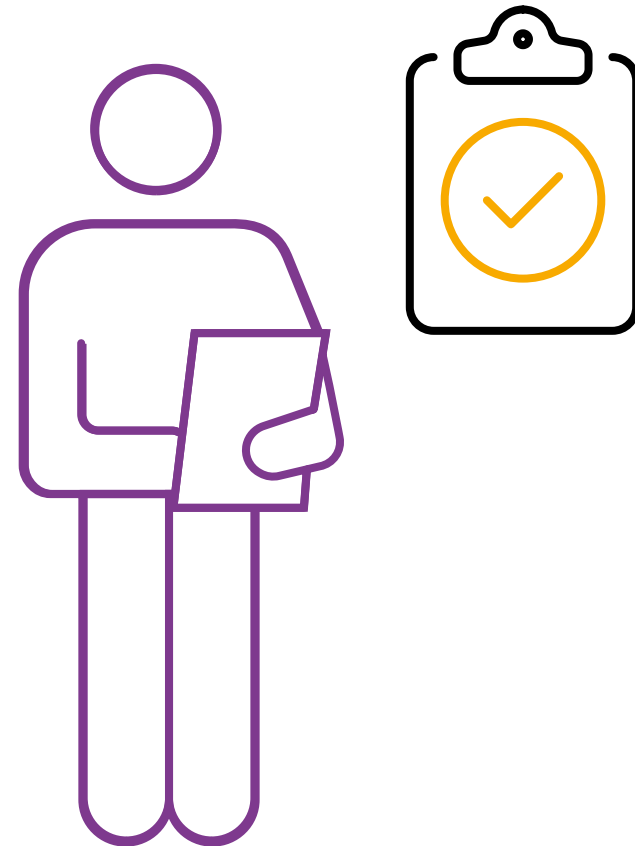
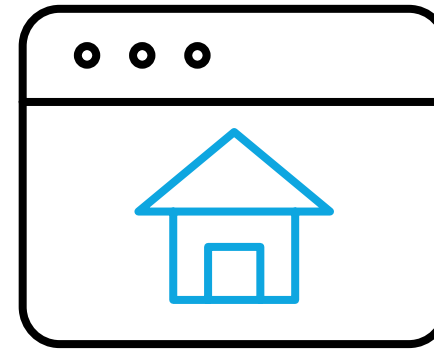
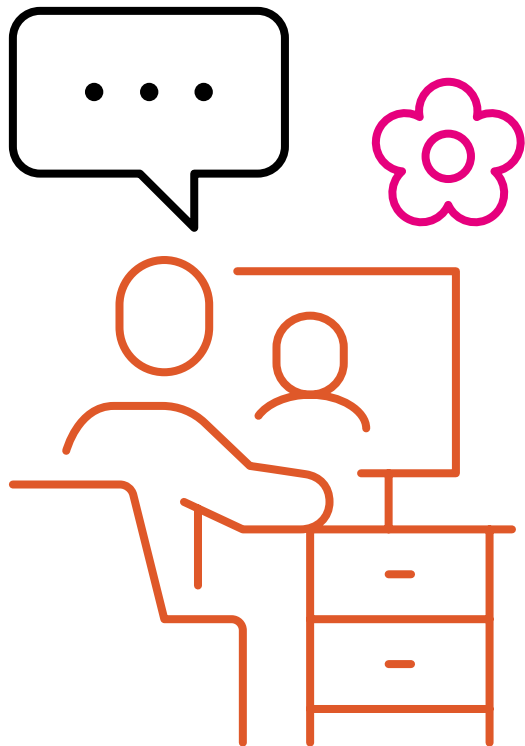
Some of the feedback we have received from communities has been hard to hear, particularly in relation to the lack of faith in front-line services and the lack of trust residents have felt in the way the Council interact with them. Both the communities we service, and the Council are facing the consequences of previous mistakes, and this is demonstrated in the low levels of satisfaction across the city.

However, we have started to make improvements. The Council are beginning to broaden the range of engagement techniques we use and are working collaboratively with partners who may have better relationships with communities, to reach out to residents. We are working on how we can improve barriers to engagement and make ourselves more accessible, particularly following the change in work practices we experienced during the pandemic.

We have welcomed the feedback from TPAS and have enabled them to support us to make positive changes and improve our engagement structures. We have begun to think through how residents can be meaningfully incorporated into our strategies and policies, setting the direction for the way our services should be delivered.

We are inviting feedback from residents, both positive and negative and hope to do more in the future to truly understand the messages we are receiving and make changes early to improve the experience of our communities.

It is accepted that we haven't always engaged well in the past and re-setting the relationship with residents will take time and there must be a deliberate and sustained approach to ensuring engagement is meaningful, regular and gives us the opportunity to act quickly when things do go wrong.



## 4.TENANT VOICE (ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION)

We recognise you are the experts because you have experienced the services that housing teams provide. We must listen to your experiences, learn from them and empower you to share them with us, so we can continually improve our services and provide safe, warm and secure homes.

Many of our tenants and residents have shared valuable feedback on their experiences of housing services. Through our extensive work with TPAS, Tenant Advocate Groups, Tenant Satisfaction surveys and other engagement, we understand that many of you do not feel heard, want better access to services, and information, as well as a more visible housing staff where you can capitalise on opportunities to influence the decisions we make.

We have used your feedback, along with the parameters set through the Transparency, Influence & Accountability standard to set our own priorities for this strategy. To help us meet your expectations and deliver on these priorities we asked for your views and ideas to shape the strategy and delivery plan.

We carried out a tenants and residents survey and focus groups, for a deeper dive into the survey questions. We also undertook a full analysis of complaints information, as well as learning from other transactional surveys and our TSM submission. We have centred what we learned around four themes:

- 1. Fairness and Respect**
- 2. Removing Barriers**
- 3. Communication**
- 4. Engagement & Influence**

### HOW DID WE APPROACH CONSULTATION?

The 'Community Influence and Engagement Survey' was distributed as a link to all residents for which we currently hold an email address or mobile phone number, using our information management system. A total of 36,186 messages were sent via email and 16,631 via text message. We received over 1600 responses. On the survey, we asked residents if they would like to express an interest in attending a focus group where we would be able to take a deeper dive, exploring their views, ideas and suggestions.

We appreciated many of our residents have engaged and provided feedback in the past. For example, 24000 residents provided feedback through TSM surveys, 9777 residents made complaints and we have physically engaged with over 600 residents to develop some of our strategies and plans. We have collated all of this information, developing key themes for improvement.

Whilst we are pleased that we have been able to engage with many residents, using a wide variety of services, we know we haven't reached everybody. Some residents reported a feeling of apathy, feeling apprehensive as to whether their feelings would be genuinely listened to and acted upon.

In the survey, we provided some multiple-choice options, where respondents could select as many as they agreed with. All questions had an 'other' option which enabled people to make their own suggestions. Each topic area had an open-ended question where residents were asked to share any additional ideas or feedback.

We want to thank every single resident who shared their feedback with us, whether this was through a complaint, as part of a regeneration drop-in surgery, through a focus group or any other form of communication, we want you to know that we are listening and we will act.



## 5. RESULTS & LEARNING

### FAIRNESS AND RESPECT

It's really important to us that our residents feel that they are being treated with fairness, courtesy, and respect. We understand that building trust is an important part of this.

We asked some specific questions to residents as part of this:

**Question 1: What can we do more of, or differently to improve your experience and ensure you are being treated with fairness and respect in your interactions with us?**

**Question 2: Please share any ideas or views you have on how we can put fairness and respect into action.**

We know that 'fairness' and 'respect' are quite subjective statements and mean different things to different people but there were some clear conclusions residents shared to help us to improve our approach.

1. Listen and act upon residents concerns and different needs
2. Provide regular updates and be honest about delays
3. Respond promptly to queries and complaints

A large proportion of respondents commented on the way their complaints were handled.

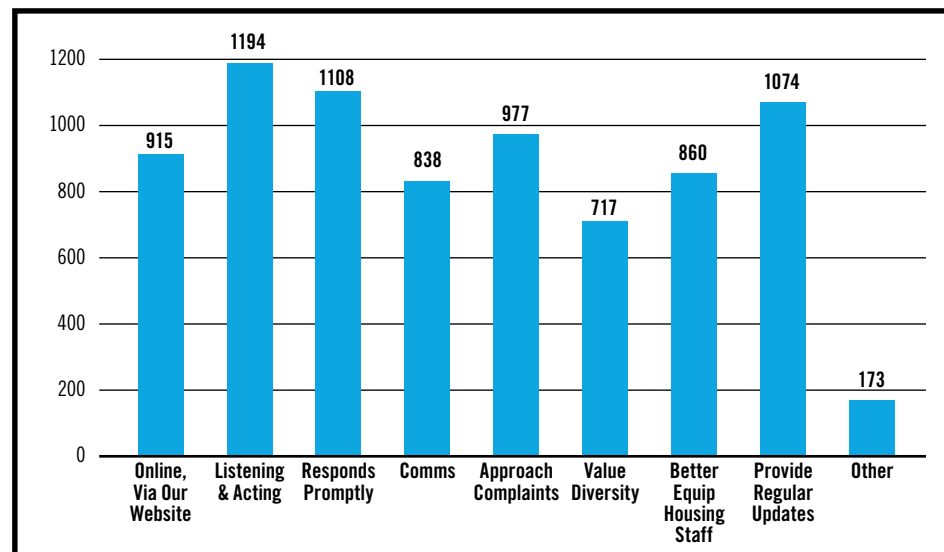
They said that they felt they are not being taken seriously, not being listened to and not being 'treated as people' and instead like 'unit dwellers'. There were lots of comments stating that customer service staff need 'training on how to speak to people' and how to 'listen and be compassionate'.

Residents said they feel that there is a lack of action when raising a complaint and they are not made aware of the process. A lot of comments stated that call handlers are 'dismissive' of matters raised and this does not translate to being treated with fairness and respect. Many felt that officers need to be more 'approachable and knowledgeable.'

These statements align to the findings of the Housing Ombudsman in the January 2023 Paragraph 49 report and the low levels of satisfaction identified through TSMs.

Whilst we know we have made progress around reducing backlogs and improving response times around how quickly we get back to residents, we must acknowledge that many residents will have had a negative experience when making a complaint and this is likely to have stayed with them.

Re-building trust in this area is going to be challenging but will be possible if we make sure our processes are focused around keeping in touch with residents, keeping them up to date and ensuring there are sufficient resources in services to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed and therefore more distant from our residents.



Data taken from a BCC survey, whereby BCC residents were asked questions about their past experience communicating with the Council and what they would like to see improve going forward. The above graph specifically illustrates the actions respondents would like to see take place in order to ensure that they are treated with more fairness and respect.

## REMOVING BARRIERS

Understanding the diverse and different needs of our residents will help us to communicate and engage in a way that suits you.

The more we know and understand about our residents, the more we can tailor our services in different ways to meet your needs.

This type of information also helps us to understand whether the feedback we receive is reflective of the city's demographic and our resident base.

We understand that many residents may not know how to share or have concerns about sharing sensitive information with us and we need to create a safe environment to do so.

**Question 1: What could we do encourage more residents to share information, and make it easier for you to share this with us?**

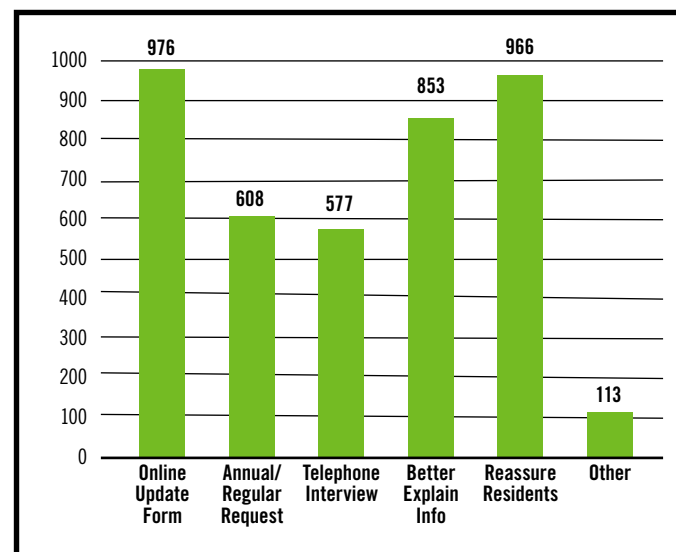
**Question 2: Please share any ideas you have on how we could better collect personal/diversity information about your needs and encourage more residents to share this type of information?**

Those who responded felt the most effective way to encourage information sharing were:

1. **Reassure residents that the information will in no way be used to discriminate against them**
2. **Better explain how the information will be used and stored**
3. **A facility that enables people to update their diversity information online independently**

We know from our attempts at contacting residents in the past, that there are gaps in knowledge around people's specific needs. This means we often don't communicate with people in the right way. Other residents feel they have shared certain information with different officers on different occasions, which means that accurate records might not be being kept.

The Council's Everybody's Battle, Everybody's Business action plan, includes the way we communicate with residents, ensuring communication is inclusive and nobody is left behind.



The above graph illustrates the actions survey respondents would like to see take place, in order to make it easier for them to share information with the Council.



## COMMUNICATION

We are keen to move away from a 'one-size fits all approach; in the way we engage and communicate with residents. We want to hear from residents and listen to their views in a way that suits them.

This includes the information we provide about the services we offer and how residents can influence the way we deliver them. We also want to let you know how we are performing in a way that is accessible and easy to understand.

**Question 1: What methods could we use to make sure you have opportunities to be informed, involved, and influence our services in a way that suits you?**

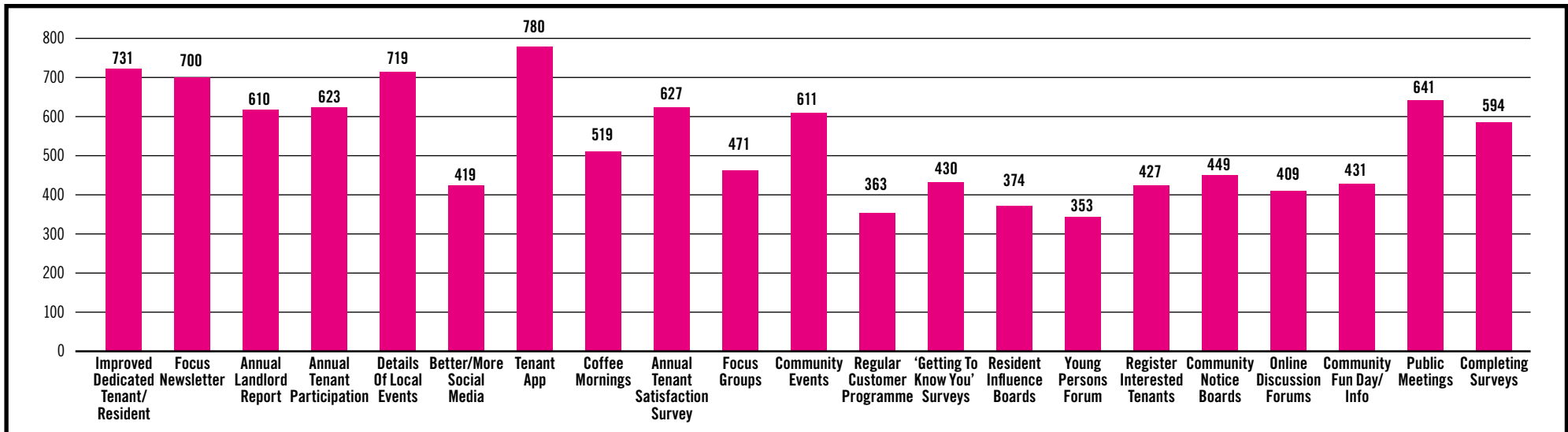
**Question 2: Please share any ideas or views you have on how we better communicate with one another.**

People do not want to be limited to one form of communication, however there were some methods that were more popular than others:

1. **Tenant Application (App)**
2. **Dedicated pages on our website**
3. **Local community events**

We expected to see a desire for better technology and information technology (IT) and the software we use is one of the key aspects of our service we would like to improve. This is a key activity in our Housing Transformation Programme.

However, it is clear that use of technology doesn't replace face to face activity, and that the Council have a role in enabling and facilitating mechanisms for the local community to come together and share their views and find out key pieces of information that are important to them.



The above graph illustrates respondents' preference for methods which could provide further opportunities for residents to be better informed by, involved with, and have greater influence over, the Council's services.

Communication was a key area that residents have focused on throughout the consultation process which prompted us to ask more questions.

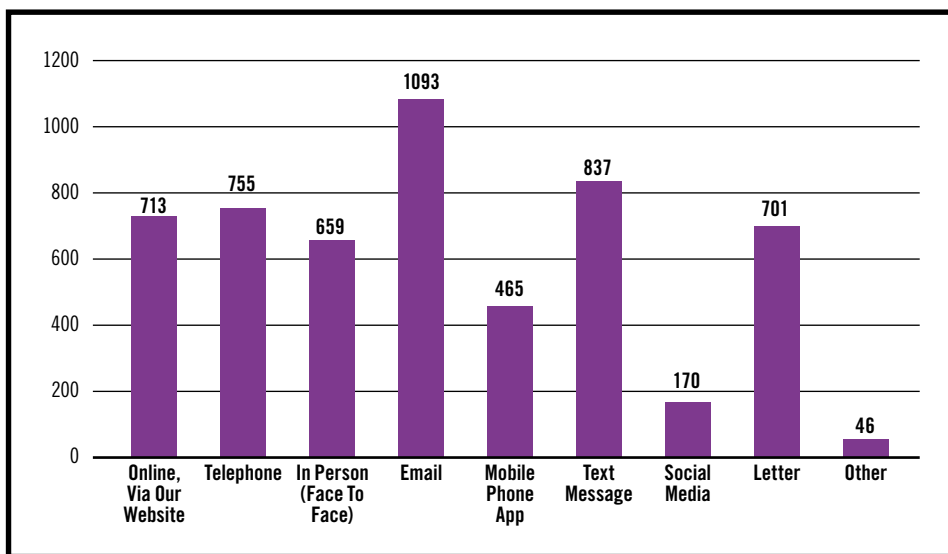
**Question 3 : What communication channels do you prefer? This includes how you would like us to contact you, and how you would prefer to contact us?**

We learned that e-mails, text messages and online content were the most popular forms of communication which will help us when developing communications plans moving forward.

Given how much feedback the communications topic generated, we have provided some of the results below.

**“When a tenant is telling you that something isn’t right, please listen to what they are saying, that’s what would encourage tenants to have more trust and faith in the council.”**

Feedback of this nature has been common both from the survey and the focus groups. Residents say that after contacting us, they rarely hear a response and, in most cases, never receive any follow up communications.



The above graph illustrates respondents’ preferred channels for communication.

To improve our relationship with our residents, we need to provide regular updates and outcomes following contact made with us. This also feeds into us being transparent and not leaving residents to feel as though they are left in the dark.

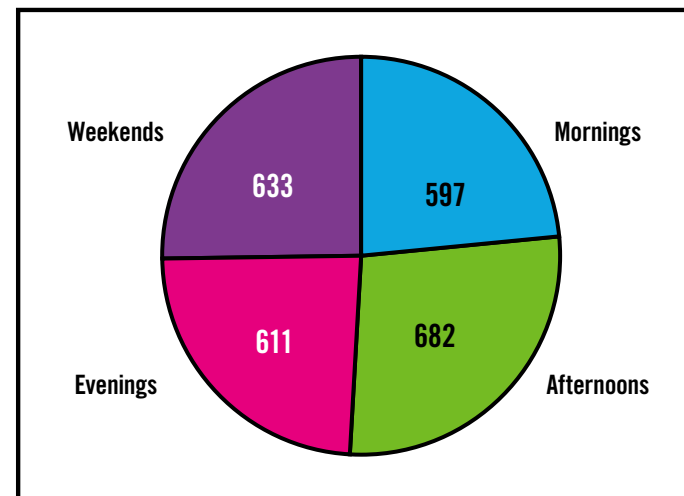
**ENGAGEMENT AND INFLUENCE**

The Council have broadened the menu of involvement for residents and communities; residents can access formal structures such as Resident Involvement Boards, Tenant Talk sessions, Leasehold Liaison Boards, focus groups etc. There are also approaches that provide more of a distance such as transactional surveys, mystery shopping and TSMs etc.

We want to encourage residents to work closely with us on improving our services, this means we need to engage in ways that work for them.

**Question 1: We understand that our residents lead busy lives. If you were to take part in engagement activity what are your preferred times of day?**

There was a clear split between the different times of day residents would like to engage, indicating that we need a mixed approach, of engagement activities taking place at different times.

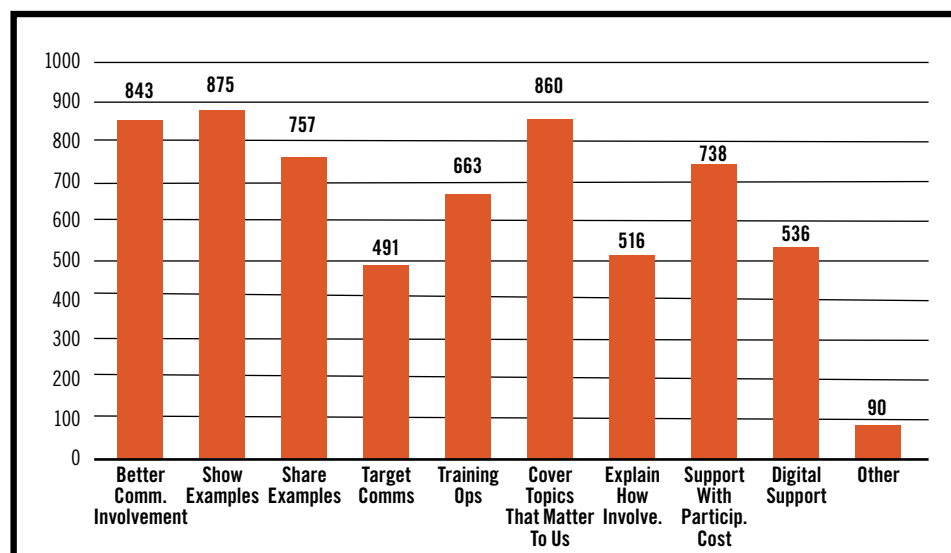


**Question 2: Is there more we could do to make you or other residents more likely to join a resident group or participate in other activity?**

There are several areas that residents highlighted in terms of increasing engagement with the Council's current engagement structures. The most popular areas are set out below:

1. Show us examples of how resident's groups have made a difference
2. Communicate involvement opportunities as a way to give back to the local community
3. Share examples of how resident's groups have influenced change or improved services
4. Support with participation costs- travel expenses, refreshments etc.

These responses indicate that residents want to better understand what the benefits of involvement are and the positive impact it has upon their neighbourhood and the services they receive.



It's also crucial that we gain a better understanding of what matters to our residents in order to improve engagement. Help with participation costs indicate that income levels could be a barrier to participation, highlighting the need for both additional support and hyper-local engagement activity.

**Question 3: Please share any ideas or views you have on what could make you or other residents more likely to join a resident group or participate in other activity?**

**"Time of day is important as often these events take part during working hours and there is an assumption that people are not at work because they live in social housing."**

**"Advertise opportunities for this via the website."**

Many people also stated that an incentive would need to be offered such as a voucher, as was offered for taking part in our focus groups for this exercise.

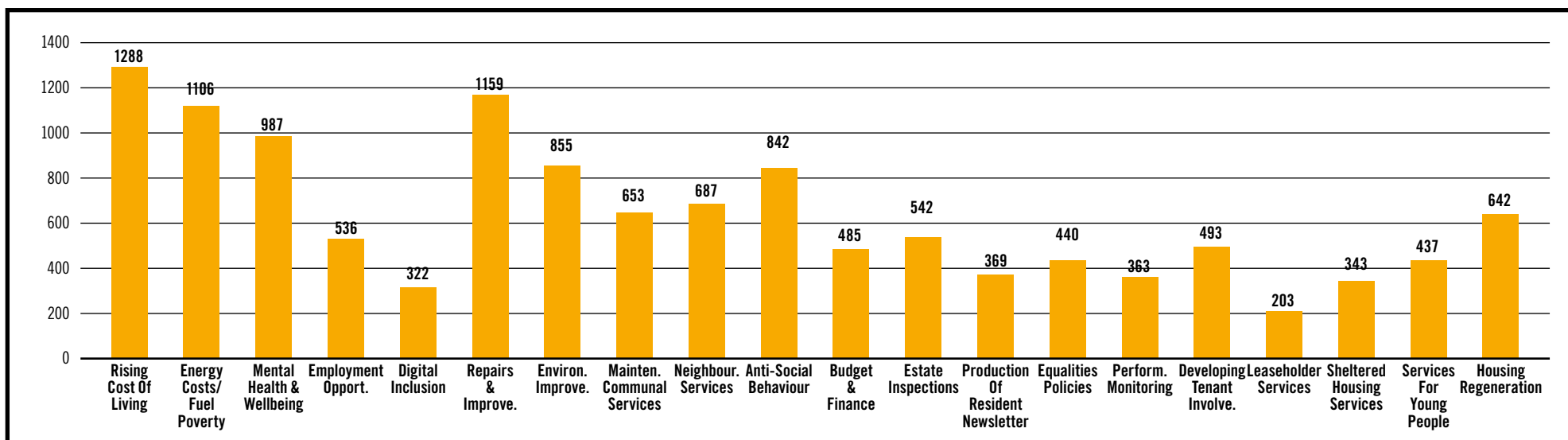
Residents also said that by evidencing that feedback provided is being actioned will encourage more people to participate as they can see that their contributions are making a difference.

**Question 4: What areas matter to you / do you have an interest in?**

1. Repairs and property improvements
2. Rising cost-of-living
3. Energy costs and fuel poverty
4. Mental health and well-being
5. Services for young people

Disproportionately high levels of deprivation, fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis continue to prove challenging in Birmingham, and it is imperative that we continue to ensure there are clear pathways for support for households experiencing hardship.

Approximately 30% of Council homes meet Decent Homes Standards. The Council undertakes circa 300,000 repairs per year and therefore it is unsurprising that this is one of the most popular area residents are interested in. Rising cost of living was most popular.



This graph illustrates which social issues and Council responsibilities matter most to the respondents surveyed.

## 6. OUR VISION & PRIORITIES

The Council acknowledges that we have not always engaged with communities well.

Through our consultation work, it is clear that residents still feel as if there are improvements to be made, and there is work to be done to develop a relationship with residents that is based on trust and transparency.

This strategy seeks to set out our intentions to reset and re-shape our approach to engagement, with a view to re-start a more positive relationship for the future.

### VISION

#### Listen, Learn, Empower

**Communities feel listened to, respected and are empowered to become actively involved in shaping housing services.**



### PRIORITIES

- **Priority 1:** Foster a culture of fairness and respect – Ensuring these principles become part of our organisational culture; a culture that recognises and values tenant engagement.
- **Priority 2:** Remove barriers to services and participation - Understanding the diverse and different needs of our residents will help us to communicate, deliver services and engage in a way that meets their needs.
- **Priority 3:** Strengthen engagement and influence opportunities - We want to work more closely with our communities so we can improve services together. Encouraging more residents to become involved, in a way that suits them.
- **Priority 4:** Improve communication and meaningful interaction – Moving away from one-size-fits all approaches, communicating with our residents and listening to their views in a way that suits them.

## 7. EMBEDDING OUR VISION

The Council recognises that improving the ways in which we engage with communities is a journey of continuous improvement.

The culture of influence and engagement is one that we want to establish over time, we know this will build a culture of trust between us and residents who use our services, enabling a greater number of residents to contribute to the services we deliver.

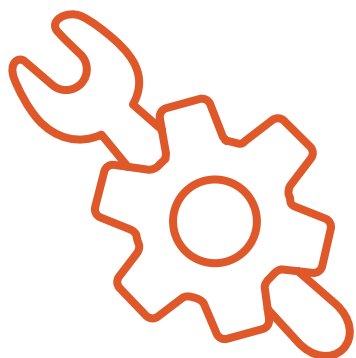
### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The priorities we have set in this strategy are grounded on the feedback we have received from residents who use our services. These priorities will be underpinned by a set of commitments that have helped us to develop an action plan.

### ACTION PLAN

In conjunction with our stakeholders, we have developed an action plan to help us to deliver this strategy. We know there is no point in having a strategy unless there are some clear actions that are drawn from it.

Each action has been tested with our residents through formal consultation groups and set out a clear expected outcome. We will monitor satisfaction, performance and progress within the action plan.



## GOVERNANCE

### OVERSIGHT

Overarching responsibility for the delivery of this strategy sits with the Councillor Jayne Francis, the Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness and the Strategic Director for City Housing.

### MONITORING

The City Housing Directorate has a Strategic Enabling function who will monitor the delivery of this strategy and the associated action plan.

The Cabinet Member for Housing & Homelessness and City Housing Leadership team will be appraised of progress regularly alongside our resident groups.

### REPORTING

An annual report will be published at the end of the financial year. We will review the action plan on a yearly basis so we can ensure it truly reflects the views and needs of residents.

We will regularly review our formal engagement framework and provide updates to the City Housing Involvement Board, the Homes Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and to all tenants in our newsletters.

### EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE

We will work with residents to evaluate the work we are doing, making sure we pivot our attention based on the lived experience of residents. This includes a Community peer research type model, drawing upon the knowledge, experience and reach of our residents to increase meaningful engagement, feedback and knowledge exchange within our neighbourhoods – capitalizing engagement with previously uninvolved tenants.



The network will provide an alternative approach to engagement, outside of formal engagement structures like the Resident Involvement Boards which are more focused on supporting specific areas that matter to our residents.

Experts by Experience will be drawn on to support specific pieces of work; this may include deep dive reviews into complaints, development of a specific strategy or policy, training delivery or engaging in focus groups or presentation work across the Directorate.

Learning from the feedback from our residents, we will explore paid opportunities for residents to deliver this important work.

We will continue to build upon existing relationships with partners and resident advocate groups such as Citizens UK, Birmingham Fair Housing Campaign and Birmingham's Poverty Truth Commission.

## REVIEW

This strategy sets out a blueprint for the next 5 years, we will review the strategy annually and publish this on our website so that residents can see how we are performing.

## MEASURES

In setting our strategic objectives and embedding our vision, we acknowledge how we are progressing against the priorities we have set out, as well as how we are achieving them.

We have developed measures that are easy to understand and provide some transparency about the starting point.

- Starting Out
- In Progress
- On Course
- Doing Well.

This means we won't settle, and we will strive to deliver the best for our residents, whilst being honest about where we are in the process. This gives residents an opportunity to be part of the solution, developing a culture of innovation and partnership.



PRIORITY 1: TO FOSTER A CULTURE OF FAIRNESS & RESPECT	OUTCOMES
<p><b>WHERE WE ARE NOW: STARTING OUT</b></p> <p>We're working with resident advocate groups, to gain an in-depth understanding on the impact of our services from people with lived experience of our services. We acknowledge 'compassion fatigue' (working individually and not with other departments) and silo working (working individually and not with other departments) contribute to poor customer experience and commit to ongoing collaboration in designing training for our teams which is informed by, and co-designed with, our customers.</p> <p><b>COMMITMENTS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We will develop our workforce to ensure that a culture of fairness and respect becomes embedded in the way we deliver services.</li> <li>2. Our leadership will be accountable for acting as a role model, promoting a culture of fairness and respect from the top.</li> <li>3. We will make sure that we are accountable for our mistakes and show that we have learned from them.</li> <li>4. We will hold our commissioned services to account, ensuring services are a high-quality and residents are satisfied with them.</li> <li>5. We will express empathy, remain courteous at all times and act quickly when things go wrong.</li> </ol>	<p><b>TIA STANDARD: 1.1, 1.1.1, 1.6.1</b></p> <p><b>TENANCY STANDARD: 1.2.1, 2.2.1, 2.2.2</b></p> <p><b>NEIGHBOURHOOD STANDARD: 1.2.1, 1.3.1</b></p>
	<p><b>TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES:</b></p> <p><b>TP01</b></p> <p><b>TP06</b></p> <p><b>TP08</b></p>

PRIORITY 2: REMOVE BARRIERS TO SERVICES AND PARTICIPATION	OUTCOMES
<p><b>WHERE WE ARE NOW: STARTING OUT</b></p> <p>We are committed to our Everybody's Battle, Everybody's Business agenda. This means that we want to find innovative solutions, where we can learn more about who lives in our communities and how we can make our services accessible. A big part of this means being more visible in our communities, making sure we know who lives in our homes and what they need from us. We want to know more about you and over the life of this strategy, this is one of our key objectives.</p> <p><b>COMMITMENTS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We will deliver on the Everybody's Battle, Everybody's Business agenda, respecting the different needs in our communities.</li> <li>2. We will learn more about you, increasing the number of times we see you and making our staff more visible to you.</li> <li>3. We will tailor our communication style to meet your needs, making information as accessible as possible.</li> <li>4. We will keep you informed about the things that matter to you, including opportunities to engage with us</li> <li>5. We will make sure that engagement is representative of the demographic across the city, hearing from the many and not just the few.</li> </ol>	<p><b>TIA STANDARD: 1.2, 2.1, 2.4.4</b></p> <p><b>TENANCY STANDARD: 1.1.1, 2.1.5</b></p> <p><b>NEIGHBOURHOOD STANDARD: 1.4, 1.4.1</b></p>
	<p><b>TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES:</b></p> <p><b>TP01</b></p> <p><b>TP06</b></p> <p><b>TP07</b></p>

PRIORITY 3: STRENGTHEN ENGAGEMENT AND INFLUENCE OPPORTUNITIES	OUTCOMES
<p><b>WHERE WE ARE NOW: IN PROGRESS</b></p> <p>We have done some work over the last 12 months to reach out to the community and promote opportunities for residents to engage with us. This includes the re-engineering engagement work we did with TPAS, reviewing our engagement structures and ensuring residents have a voice in big strategic projects like community regeneration. Whilst we have progressed this area, we want to make sure this approach is embedded in our culture, so residents always have an opportunity to influence the way we do things.</p> <p><b>COMMITMENTS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We will embed our new engagement structures, undertaking initiatives to give all residents the opportunity to have a chance to participate.</li> <li>2. We will ensure any strategic project has a deliberate and clear plan around how residents can be engaged from the outset and inform delivery.</li> <li>3. We will make it easy for residents to understand what engagement opportunities are available and make them accessible to be part of.</li> <li>4. We will better publicise the positive outcomes residents can get from being part of our engagement mechanisms.</li> <li>5. We won't make big changes to the way we deliver services, without giving residents a chance to be part of the solution.</li> </ol>	<p><b>TIA STANDARD: 1.1, 1.1.1, 1.6.1</b></p> <p><b>TENANCY STANDARD: 1.2.1, 2.2.1, 2.2.2</b></p> <p><b>NEIGHBOURHOOD STANDARD: 1.2.1, 1.3.1</b></p>
	<p><b>TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES:</b></p> <p><b>TP01</b></p> <p><b>TP06</b></p> <p><b>TP07</b></p> <p><b>TP08</b></p> <p><b>TP09</b></p>

PRIORITY 4: IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND MEANINGFUL INTERACTION	OUTCOMES
<p><b>WHERE WE ARE NOW: IN PROGRESS</b></p> <p>We have done some work over the last 12 months to begin to change the way we communicate with you. This has included building a data base of accurate contact details and embedding a text/email function. It is our intention to make sure communication is planned, appropriate and delivered in a range of ways, so that you get the information you need and don't lose out on opportunities to contribute..</p> <p><b>COMMITMENTS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We will develop a communications plan which will make sure any communications with residents are thoughtful and meaningful.</li> <li>2. We will broaden the scope of communication methods to make sure we make provision for people's preferences.</li> <li>3. We will develop service standards setting out clear expectations around response times etc.</li> <li>4. We will improve the quality and speed in which we handle complaints, ensuring residents feel supported when things go wrong.</li> <li>5. We ensure provision of regular information is provided in a wide variety of formats and is based on what is important to residents.</li> </ol>	<p><b>TIA STANDARD: 2.5, 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 2.3,</b></p> <p><b>TENANCY STANDARD: 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.4.1,</b></p> <p><b>NEIGHBOURHOOD STANDARD: 1.2.1, 1.3.1</b></p>
	<p><b>TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES:</b></p> <p><b>TP01</b></p> <p><b>TP06</b></p> <p><b>TP07</b></p>

