The Guide for Housing Liaison Boards in Birmingham
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Welcome to the HLB Guide

by Joan Goodwin – Chair, Birmingham City HLB

Our Housing Liaison Boards have been in existence for over twenty years across the city, so it gives me great pleasure to introduce the first ever guide to HLBs. I hope this guide will encourage more tenants to get actively involved locally. You will see throughout the guide that tenants can, and do, influence decisions and make a difference working together in partnership with Birmingham City Council, its Housing Officers and Contractors. Our new recognised kitemark endorsed by Birmingham City Council gives us their full support also.

My grateful thanks to all who have worked with us on the guide especially the members of the Tenants Steering Group of City HLB, Paul Slatter from Chamberlain Forum for his expertise and guidance, and Fiona Hughes and other Housing Officers.

by Councillor John Cotton – Birmingham City Council, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Management & Homes

Meeting Birmingham’s housing challenge and ensuring that people have affordable, decent homes, is an important part of the drive to build a fairer city for us all. But homes are much more than just a matter of bricks and mortar. It’s about more than just a roof. People want to live in strong communities and have the chance to shape the decisions about their neighbourhood.

Housing Liaison Boards have played a vital role in giving tenants a voice in neighbourhoods across the city. With the devolution of tenant engagement and local consultation to the City’s district and ward committees we have a great opportunity to give even more influence to local people.

This guide is designed to help HLBs, and neighbourhoods that want to set up new HLBs, with this vital work. My colleagues and I look forward to continue to work in partnership with HLBs to deliver better homes and stronger communities for all.
Introduction

The aim of this guide is to help service users improve council housing in partnership with Birmingham City Council through strong and active Housing Liaison Boards (HLBs). It should be useful to HLB members and to all council tenants and leaseholders who want to know more about HLBs and may want to join their local HLB. It should also be of use to: local housing teams; councillors and council staff; people who work for other organisations which work with HLBs; and to any Birmingham resident who wants to find out more.

The Guide is split into 3 parts:

1. **Understanding HLBs** - looks at what HLBs are for; how they work; who runs them and how they are organised.

2. **What HLBs Can Do** - covers the part HLBs play in improving, shaping and coregulating Council housing services; HLB projects; estate assessment walkabouts; communications, including HLB websites; representation; and City HLB. City HLB is the body made up by representatives of HLBs from across Birmingham.

3. **Getting Better All the Time** deals with quality; legal and financial issues; the HLB Kitemark; good conduct; and how to get involved in your HLB.

Each part sets out to:

- describe briefly what is expected of HLBs and provide a set of handy reminders
- highlight what HLBs can achieve, above and beyond the minimum, and to suggest ways of making HLBs even better.

The Guide is not intended to replace existing rules and policies relating to HLBs, but to explain how they work in practice. At the end of the Guide is a section with links to more information. These links are also online – along with a copy of this guide – at the City HLB website: [www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved)
Part 1: Understanding HLBs
Part 1: Understanding HLBs

Housing Liaison Boards are made up of volunteers. They are elected by council tenants and leaseholders to represent them and to help improve their part of Birmingham. This part of the Guide looks at what an HLB is, who the members are, how an HLB works in practice and gives an example of what the Agenda looks like at an HLB meeting. This part also explains the process by which an HLB comes to be recognised by Birmingham City Council and City HLB.

1.1 What is a Housing Liaison Board?
A Housing Liaison Board (HLB) is a group of volunteers who monitor and improve Council housing services in their area. HLB members include council tenants and leaseholders; other local residents and councillors; and housing staff. The HLB is a non-party political body which is led by people who use Council housing services (tenants and leaseholders are sometimes called housing service users). Its job is to make sure service users views shape improvements in council housing services and in the wider neighbourhood. No one is paid to be a member of an HLB. Members use their position to benefit the wider community, not their own narrow, personal interest.

There are local HLBs covering most parts of Birmingham where there is council housing. There is a City HLB which brings together representatives from each of the local HLBs. You can get in touch with City HLB and check whether there is a local HLB covering where you live:

- on the City HLB website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved
- at your local housing office (addresses are given under Further Information at the end of the Guide).

As well as local HLBs, eight of Birmingham’s ten districts have a Sheltered HLB for people living in sheltered housing. There is a city-wide Sheltered HLB and a Leaseholders Liaison Board which covers leaseholders from across the city. Details of these are on the website and available via local housing offices.

To be recognised as an HLB, a group must meet the standards set out in this guide and be accepted as an HLB by City HLB and Birmingham City Council. All recognised HLBs must have a clear set of aims which have been agreed by its members. These aims should be included in the HLBs constitution and reported on in the HLBs annual report. You can find the constitution; the annual report; details of meetings; and, contact information on your local HLB website which you can find by clicking on the map on City HLB’s site at www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved

If your area doesn’t have an HLB, then please talk to your local Housing Office, or contact City HLB, about setting one up.
Birmingham City Council aims to provide services that are responsive to the needs and expectations of service users. Doing this means taking account of tenants and leaseholders views in decisions on the design, delivery and performance of services so that:

1. Tenants’ views are taken into account when making important decisions about how services will be designed and delivered
2. All tenants have opportunities to take part in designing and managing services in ways that suit them
3. As far as possible, a cross-section of tenants will be involved in decision-making. That might mean, for example, putting in extra effort to reach out to particular groups of tenants who may face difficulties in getting involved otherwise.

HLBs play an important part in helping the Council to achieve these objectives in particular the first objective above. But the Council and HLBs recognise that not every tenant finds HLBs the easiest or best way to be involved. To encourage tenants and leaseholders to get involved the Council has put together the booklet ‘How tenants and leaseholders can get involved in their neighbourhood’.

Aside from HLBs, the ‘How tenants and leaseholders can get involved in their neighbourhood’ booklet includes tenants being able to:

- comment using repairs satisfaction slips, take part in tenant surveys and have the chance to join the Council’s consultation register
- train and work as a tenant inspector alongside housing staff, to become a block champion or to take part in focus groups on particular issues
- join a local residents’ association or neighbourhood forum (the Council provides grants to some of these bodies, but they are not seen, or recognised, as tenants voices in the same way as HLBs are)
- take steps to set up a Tenant Managed Organisation – which enables tenants to take on the management of housing in an area on behalf of the Council.

HLBs are not undermined by these, or other, alternative ways in which the Council involves tenants and leaseholders. The Council has said that nothing it does to involve tenants should be seen as detracting from the importance it attaches to local HLBs.
1.2 How does a housing liaison board work?

HLBs meet regularly, between 6 and 10 times a year (usually each month except in August and December). They publish a schedule of future meeting dates and times. This is available on their website and from the local housing office. All members of an HLB can attend all meetings. All the business of the HLB is considered at the meeting. HLBs do not form sub-groups or committees to deal with specific issues. Anyone can attend an HLB meeting as an observer, but you should give the Chair reasonable notice that you want to attend. In exceptional circumstances, the Chair can ask observers to leave the meeting, for example if the HLB needs to discuss information which is confidential.

HLBs are supported by staff from the local housing office. This means that a council officer – often a Tenant Participation Officer – may: arrange the venue and refreshments at HLB meetings; take the meeting notes; and circulate agendas and draft meeting notes to members. The agenda at meetings is agreed by the Chair and Place Manager (who replaced Local Housing Managers following a management review in July 2014). The Place Manager, and other members of the local housing team, may also come to HLB meetings.

The typical agenda (list of things to be discussed) at an HLB meeting is shown on the next page. The agenda for a meeting is published on the HLB website and circulated to members before the meeting. The draft minutes (notes of what happened at the meeting) are circulated to members before the next meeting. Meeting notes, however, are not published on the website until after they have been agreed by members as an accurate record of the meeting.

HLBs have a clear set of rules in their Constitution, Code of Conduct and other policies they may have agreed. These should be in Plain English and they will have been agreed by the members. They set out how residents can complain if they think the rules have not been applied; how complaints will be dealt with; and the process for dealing with, and reporting the outcome of, any complaints along with details of the appeals process. The HLB’s rules including how it handles complaints should be available for you to read on its website and at the local housing office.
Meetings play a key role in what HLBs do. An HLB agenda will usually look like this:

**Attendance and Apologies** – who is at the meeting and who has been unable to attend. Members should give apologies if they cannot attend. If a member misses three meetings in a row without giving any apologies, then they may be removed from membership.

**Guest Speaker(s)** – HLBs may invite anyone to speak at their meeting. The Chair decides where they will be heard on the agenda. They are often invited to speak before the main business part of the meeting.

**Notes of the Last Meeting** – HLB members agree the draft notes of the previous meeting with any amendments. The agreed meeting note can then be published on the HLB website as a formal record of the meeting.

**Matters Arising** – Members discuss progress on any action points that were agreed at the last meeting but which are not covered elsewhere on the agenda. (It is good practice to highlight action points on the draft meeting notes describing the action to be taken and the name of the person, or people, the meeting expects to take the action).

**Chair’s Report** – the Chair reports on what has happened since the last HLB meeting and any decisions, communications or actions they have taken on behalf of the HLB. They ask other members to help give the report if, for example, those members deputised for them at another meeting. Members can question, discuss and agree any further actions needed as a result.

**Housing Reports** – officers and contractors for the City Council give reports on the plans and performance of the housing service including reports on repairs, the Tenant Quality Promise (TQP), and estate services. Members can question, discuss and agree further action to be taken as a result.

**Report from City HLB** – the member who represented the HLB at the last City HLB meeting gives a report. Members can question, discuss and agree any further actions needed as a result.

**HLB Projects** – The HLB takes reports on progress on projects and discusses and agrees any new projects as necessary (see page 24).

**Estate Walkabouts** – The HLB takes reports on estate walkabouts and discusses and agrees future walkabouts as necessary (see page 25).

**Any Other Business (AOB)** – Members can raise anything relevant to the HLB but which has not otherwise been noted or discussed. HLB meetings are not the best places to raise personal and specific housing problems unless they highlight a general point. It is good practice if members inform the Chair before the meeting that they have other business to raise.
1.3 Who runs a Housing Liaison Board?
An HLB must have at least six, and usually no more than 20, members. The HLB should list its members and their contact details (which may be care of the local Housing Office) on its website. At least three-quarters of members of an HLB must be tenants, leaseholders or their household members over the age of 16. The Chair and Vice Chair of an HLB – elected by the members – must be tenants or leaseholders (service users). But, remember, anyone – a local councillor or resident – can attend HLB meetings as a non-voting observer.

The membership can also include people who are not service users. Other people who can join an HLB as members are:

- anyone else over the age of 16 who lives in the area covered by it
- a local councillor for a ward including part of the area covered by the HLB.

But the 75% rule makes these places quite limited, for example:

- if the HLB has 6 members, then there is at most one member place on the Board for another resident or councillor
- if the HLB has 20 members, then there are at most five member places for other residents or councillors.

It can be useful to include people who are not service users as members of an HLB if, for example, they:

- have specialist knowledge or experience eg as a councillor or a local businessperson, or in housing management or some other relevant way
- represent a local community with members who include council housing service users eg as a representative of a residents association, youth group, faith group or other community group in the area.

Members who are not tenants or leaseholders can vote on general matters including on the HLB Projects budget, but they cannot vote on things which are to do with Council housing services and only affect tenants and leaseholders.
Guidance: Working as a Team

A Housing Liaison Board is a group of volunteers. The local housing team covers their expenses and helps them organise meetings; but no one is paid to be a member of an HLB. The main reason most people join is that they want to see things improve in the area around where they live. The main reason people stay involved is because they enjoy being part of a group with other residents and getting things done by working as an effective team. Teamwork matters. Enabling teamwork is everyone’s responsibility.

Some personal habits and practices which make teamwork easier:

Be constructive – members don’t always agree: debate and discussion are good. You can help keep things constructive by being clear, direct and honest when you speak; by respecting the Chair; and by respecting the feelings of other members. Try not to react defensively even if someone seems critical.

Active listening – members sometimes have difficult things to explain to each other. You can help by thinking about what you are hearing and giving whoever is speaking signs that you are listening carefully. Allow people to finish the point they are making and allow the Chair to run the meeting fairly.

Be reliable – members can’t always do everything they say they will. If you can’t do something, then the best thing is to be straight and tell the team you can’t. You can help others by thanking them when they do a good job and making it OK for people to say when they haven’t been able to.

Come prepared – members should come prepared for meetings and able to take part in them by listening and speaking when needed. Don’t just sit passively and wait for things to happen. If you don’t understand what’s going on, ask a question. The chances are you won’t be the only one who would like an explanation.

Be reasonable – members should be willing and able to hear views they don’t agree with, or don’t yet understand. Listen before you make up your mind. If you don’t like a decision, then say so – but once it’s made, move on. Don’t leave the meeting complaining and moaning if you can help it.

Share resources – members share information, know-how and their time. They speak up when they think they have something to offer. You can help by responding to requests for help and taking the initiative in supporting other team members.

Some things HLBs can do as groups to work better:

Be social. A team is a group that plays to the strengths of its members. HLB social events can help members find out about each others’ strengths and, so, help the group work better as a team.

Share the work. Don’t let the Chair do all the work: share jobs out. The Chair doesn’t necessarily have to chair every meeting or represent the HLB at every event.

It’s the job of all HLB members to help others work together as a team. HLBs whose members work together as a team achieve more than those that don’t.
1.4 How is a Housing Liaison Board elected and organised?

HLBs members are elected every two years at a meeting which is advertised to residents in the area the HLB covers – including by a notice on the HLB’s website. The notice of this meeting (which HLBs often call the biennial meeting) includes:

- the agenda for the meeting
- information about how people can be nominated for election to the HLB (HLBs can set their own rules about this)
- and, unless the HLB is newly set up, the notes of the last meeting at which such elections took place (usually two years previously).

The annual report of the HLB (or a report from the Chair on progress made by the HLB) should either be included with the notice or made available at the meeting. The meeting is usually chaired by the Place Manager.

At the first HLB meeting after the ‘biennial’ meeting, the members elect a Chair and Vice Chair. All members can vote in this election. In the same way, the HLB decides who will represent it at City HLB. This is often, but not necessarily, the Chair. HLBs can appoint other officers if the members agree, eg an HLB could appoint a member to be responsible for looking after its website.

Anyone can come to an HLB meeting as an observer as long as they give the Chair reasonable notice that they want to attend. All HLBs must organise at least one public meeting a year which is advertised to everyone in its area through the website and at the local housing office. The HLB makes its annual report to this meeting.

An HLB can co-opt members between elections as long as it sticks to the limits on: the overall size of the Board; and the proportion of tenants and leaseholders it includes. An HLB might co-opt members to:

- be more representative of people across the area and in terms of the age, gender, ethnicity, type of accommodation, housing tenure etc
- enable tenants and leaseholders who want to get involved, and may already be involved as block champions etc, to become HLB members without having to wait up to 2 years to be elected onto the Board
- enable the HLB to include people with particular expertise.

Members who are co-opted, however, must stand for election at the next biennial meeting if they want to carry on serving as members.

The date, time and venue of HLB meetings are advertised in advance HLBs publish a list of meetings for the year ahead. This list and the agreed meeting notes and agendas of meetings are made publicly available on the website and at the local housing office.

The Place Manager and their staff particularly the local Tenant Participation Officer can support HLB meetings. They usually: arrange meeting rooms; take the meeting notes; and present, or introduce, reports about the plans and performance of the housing service at HLB meetings. Housing staff can help the HLB make sure that its decisions are communicated and lead to action. Officers can, however, only support – not lead – the HLB. The main responsibility for: taking decisions; telling people about them; and chasing up on
any actions resulting from them, rests with HLB members.

Decision making at HLB meetings is usually by consensus. That means: the Chair ensures sufficient discussion until a course of action that all members are satisfied with is agreed. Everyone has the right to be heard and all members are respected. If voting is needed, each member gets one vote unless the issue being decided is only to do with Council housing services in which case only members who are housing service users (tenants and leaseholders) have a vote.

In deciding the time of day and where they meet, HLBs take into account that meetings should be accessible for as many residents as possible – including people with work and care commitments and people with special needs.
Agendas – should be sent out in advance if possible. They can be put on the website as soon as they are drafted. The agenda may follow the standard format (see page 7) but even so, it’s a good idea to go through it at the start of the meeting to check everyone understands it. The Chair can let members suggest any changes to the order of items at the start of the meeting.

Attendance and apologies – consider using a sign-in sheet with a space for people to update their contact details and for people to give apologies on behalf of others. Sign-in sheets enable you to get contact details of people who attend as observers. Members can use them to update their email and phone numbers.

Chairing – during the meeting the Chair keeps order and makes sure that the business is kept on track. It is hard to chair a meeting and be one of the main speakers. The person who is elected as the Chair of the HLB (who represents it between meetings and presents the Chairs report etc) does not necessarily have to chair every (or any) meeting.

Matters Arising – is for checking off actions agreed at the last meeting (including matters arising from the previous one) which do not need further discussion and, therefore, do not feature as items on the agenda. A group that is regularly spending a long time on matters arising, should take time to think more carefully about the way it puts together the agenda.

Minutes – are called minutes because they are short. They should accurately record the important details of the meeting: who was there and who gave apologies; what decisions were made; what actions were decided on and who will be responsible for doing them. Descriptive detail about who said what often leads to pointless arguments about accuracy.

Timings – consider putting timings on the agenda showing how long you think each item might take. You don’t have to stick to them rigidly, but it can focus minds.

Informal Time – HLB meetings have formal business to go through, but that doesn’t mean you can’t have some space on the agenda for less formal things too: networking (perhaps during a short tea break); 10 minutes for people to raise urgent local issues. Even if they are things the HLB can’t directly do anything about it can still be useful. HLB members and members of the housing team who are present may be able to signpost service users to other sources of help.

Meeting in Public – occasionally items on HLB agendas need to be dealt with in private. As a rule, however, anyone who lives in the area should be welcome. If you’re worried about space, you can ask people to let the Chair know in advance that they want to attend. Make meetings welcoming for members and non-members alike you can let non-members speak (they can’t vote). A meeting may be the first time a potential new member comes across an HLB – why miss the opportunity to make a good impression?

Public Meetings – usually the annual meeting at which the HLB presents its report. But you can organise further public meetings during the year to keep tenants informed and you can, of course, organise social meetings as well as business meetings.
1.5 Recognising and supporting HLBs

Any group of residents can set up, or join, an association to represent their interests or to help them take action to improve them. In Birmingham, there are thousands of such groups: residents’ associations, self-help groups, youth clubs, church groups, political and campaigning bodies, charities, unions and professional clubs. In one way, Housing Liaison Boards are just like any other community group that belongs to its members – council tenants and leaseholders. HLBs, however, also have a special set of rights and responsibilities outlined in the next part of this guide – What HLBs Can Do.

To get these rights and responsibilities, an HLB has to show it meets the standard set for HLBs by the City Housing Liaison Board (City HLB) and Birmingham City Council. After City HLB and the Council have checked it meets this standard, it becomes the sole recognised HLB for its area. The Council can support it with training, information, funding and staff time. This support from the Council aims to help an HLB:

- play a part in the formal co-regulation of Birmingham City Council as a social landlord
- work with others to make the neighbourhood a better place to live including by using a budget to fund small projects in the area
- act as the recognised forum through which all tenants and leaseholders in an area are able to shape service delivery – for example through estate walkabouts
- ensure that the tenants and leaseholders in its area are represented at City HLB and can be supported by it when they need.

There can only ever be one HLB covering a given area. HLBs can vary in size: some cover a ward, some part of a ward, some an area larger than a ward – but they cannot overlap. The chart on the next page shows the stages in setting up an HLB. It only applies in areas which are not currently covered by a recognised HLB.
Diagram: setting up an HLB follows this process

1. Tenants and leaseholders meet and decide they want to consider forming an HLB for their area. They can form a shadow HLB and meet for several months to sort out the details.

2. They agree a constitution at a public meeting called for the purpose. The Place Manager takes copies and sends a copy of the constitution and the minutes of the meeting to City HLB.

3. City HLB and the Council look at papers provided, check them against the HLB Standard, look at any advice from the Place Manager and either approves the application or asks the group to make changes.

4. Once an HLB has been recognised it can use the HLB Kitemark and it can send a representative to be part of City HLB.

5. The new HLB elects a chair; agrees dates for regular meetings; updates website with help from the local Housing Team.

6. The local Tenant Participation Officer can help tenants do this by providing meeting rooms, introducing them to other active residents and putting them in touch with neighbouring HLBs.

7. City HLB has a standard constitution which groups that want to be recognised as an HLB can use. This is available from the City HLB website.

8. Once City HLB has checked the new HLB, the Place Manager can arrange the support that the Council is committed to providing to recognised HLBs including: use of meeting rooms, information, reports, project funding and admin support if required.

9. HLBs support the City HLB by sending representatives to meetings who may also take part in Service Improvement Groups set up by City HLB.

10. City HLB supports HLBs with guidance, access to a website and can take up cases on their behalf if they have disputes or issues which cannot be settled locally.

Note: City HLB and Birmingham City Council may review the award of the Kitemark to an HLB on a regular basis (or in response to complaints of serious misconduct made by local councillors or service users). If the review is satisfactory, then the HLB will continue to be recognised. The Council and City HLB may, however, agree a list of improvements that need to be made and reserve the right to suspend or withdraw the use of the Kitemark if it is necessary to de-recognise an HLB, eg if it does not have enough members to carry on.
Part 2: What can HLBs do?
Part 2: What can HLBs do?

HLBs can bring all sorts of tenants and other residents in an area together to make it a better place to live. They also have special rights and responsibilities. This part of the Guide explains: coregulation of council housing and the part HLBs – acting as ‘tenant panels’ – play in it; project funding; estate walkabouts and the ways HLBs can influence local affairs through communication, networking and partnership working.

2.1 Coregulating council housing
Housing Liaison Boards (HLBs) are taking on an important new role: helping to regulate the Council’s housing services and make sure they are up to standard. All landlords who own and manage social housing now have to show that the decisions they make benefit tenants and potential future tenants. To make sure this is done fairly, the government has a regulator for social housing. The regulator is the body which sets and oversees the overall standards that social landlords are judged against. In 2010, the government reviewed the system for regulating social landlords. As a result, they merged the Tenant Services Authority (which was the regulator) with the Homes and Communities Agency (which was the body responsible for registering social landlords and funding new social housing).

The Homes and Communities Agency
In 2012, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) became responsible for setting the standards for social landlords. In March 2012, the HCA published consumer standards applying to local authorities which – like Birmingham City Council – have retained council housing. ‘The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England’ published by the HCA sets out four consumer standards for Birmingham City Council and other social landlords:

- **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment** – this standard covers the way information is provided to tenants; how complaints are dealt with; opportunities for tenant involvement and empowerment; and how the landlord responds to the diverse needs of its tenants.

- **Decent Homes** – the Decent Homes standard applies to the quality of accommodation, repairs and maintenance the landlord provides.

- **Tenancies** – this standard covers allocations, lettings and exchanges and tenancy agreements.

- **The Wider Neighbourhood and Community** – covers the way the environment of the estate and neighbourhood is managed; how anti-social behaviour is prevented and dealt with; and how the landlord cooperates with others to improve the prospects for the area as a whole.

“Co-Regulation”
Although the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) sets consumer standards, the government has given the job of making sure that landlords live up to them to tenants and landlords working together through what it calls coregulation. This is because the government wants landlords to be accountable to their tenants, not to bodies set up by central government.

The HCA can still intervene – but only where the City Council fails to meet a consumer standard and causes, or risks causing, serious detriment to tenants or
potential tenants. ‘Serious detriment’ could mean physical harm, financial loss or some other serious damage or risk caused to tenants or potential tenants. In deciding whether to take action, the HCA can take into account information from Housing Liaison Boards, other recognised bodies representing tenants and residents, local councillors and MPs, the Housing Ombudsman, the Health and Safety Executive and the fire and rescue authority (West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service).

**HLBs Role in Coregulation**

Being part of coregulating council housing means HLBs help the Council to check how well it measures up to the four consumer standards:

- Tenant involvement and empowerment
- Providing decent quality accommodation and repairs
- Managing tenancies in a fair and efficient way
- Running the housing service so as to contribute to the well-being of the wider neighbourhood and community.

Coregulation doesn’t mean HLBs on their own taking on the task of checking up how the Council does. Their job is to help the Council make sure things are up to scratch. Some aspects of the Council’s services are scrutinised by HLBs through City HLB. Some may be done at District level. Some is done directly by HLBs at the local level. The Council and City HLB aim to help to make sure that HLBs have the skills, confidence, information and support they need to do a good job of coregulating housing services in partnership with the Council.

**The Consumer Standards**

The next two pages set out in more detail what is covered by the four consumer standards that HLBs help to make sure the Council maintains.

**Tenant involvement and empowerment –**

HLBs (working through City HLB and at District level as well as at local level) should help to check and review:

- the quality of information the Council produces for tenants and other service users and how it communicates with them
- the clarity and effectiveness of the Council’s complaints process
- the opportunities the Council makes for tenants to be involved in:
  - setting priorities and policies
  - decisions about how housing services are delivered (including the setting of service standards)
  - scrutinising performance against standards
- opportunities the Council provides for tenants to get directly involved in managing their homes, repair and maintenance services, and arrangements for tenants to be able to undertake repairs themselves
- whether, and how, the Council understands and responds to the diverse needs of tenants including:
  - treating all tenants with fairness and respect
  - showing they understand the different needs of tenants, including tenants with extra support needs.
Providing decent quality accommodation and repairs – HLBs (acting as above) will help the Council to check and review:

• whether council homes meet the Decent Homes standard (and any higher standards that apply depending on when they were built etc.) and that they are maintained so they continue to meet standards

• the responsiveness and cost-effectiveness of repairs and maintenance services provided by and paid for by the Council.

Managing tenancies in a fair and efficient – way HLBs will help (as above) check and review:

• the fairness, efficiency and transparency of allocations, exchange and lettings processes taking into account housing need and the choices of tenants and potential tenants so as to check the Council:
  o makes the best use of available housing
  o delivers on its strategic housing function and helps to create more sustainable communities

• the clarity of applications, decision-making and appeals processes

• whether tenants are able to exchange their tenancy including by using internet-based exchange services

• tenancy agreements to see that they meet legal requirements and that they are compatible with: the purpose of the accommodation; the needs of individual households; the sustainability of the wider community; and the efficient use of the Council’s housing stock.

Running the Housing Service so as to contribute to the well-being of the wider neighbourhood and community – HLBs (as above) will help to check and review:

• the contribution the Council is making to wider neighbourhood management in terms of:
  o its direct responsibilities, eg for street cleanliness and community safety
  o whether the Housing Service is working effectively in partnership with tenants, other social landlords, other parts of the City Council and other public agencies, like the police, to look after the neighbourhood as a whole in a joined-up way
  o whether the Council is working well with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where it owns properties

• whether the Council is working in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.
A lot of information which is provided to HLBs by the City Council is about the resources used to provide the housing service (inputs) and the activities carried out as part of the service (outputs). HLB members, however, are more interested in the difference that has been made to people and places (the outcomes).

As HLBs take on more of a role in coregulating the council housing service in partnership with the Council, the amount of information about inputs and outputs (costs and performance measures) is likely to increase. HLB members need ways of questioning this information to make sense of it. One way is to ask questions:

**How?** How things are done can make such a difference to the impact achieved that organisations often have agreed rules dictating the details of how they will be done. These sets of rules are called policies. For example, an allocations policy doesn’t determine how many people will be given a tenancy, but it does describe how they will be chosen. Organisations don’t always have the right policies or follow the ones they have. Asking how outputs have been achieved is a useful question.

**Where?** Where activities take place can make a big difference to the impact they have. Sometimes, things need to be concentrated to gain best effect and sometimes they need to be spread around. So, for example, focusing planned investment in one neighbourhood or district might enable more to be achieved than pepper-potting the work across the whole city. At the same time, the decision to focus work in one area might lead to tenants in others either being treated unfairly or feeling they have been treated unfairly. People’s feelings can count as much as the technical statistics that come with a plan or a report. Where something happens is important for both technical and human and social reasons.

**Who?** Who has been involved in planning and delivering a service can make a difference to what is achieved. Who benefits makes a difference too. For example: involving tenants, young people and the police in action on antisocial behaviour might make more of an impact than the local Housing Team acting on its own. An HLB which has a wide network of tenants and relates well to the menu of opportunities for tenant involvement is likely to add more value have more impact than one which is not in touch with most tenants. ‘Who was involved’ and ‘Who benefits’ are two key questions to ask about any activity.

**When?** When activities take place has a bearing on how useful they are. For example: an HLB which holds six meetings in a year at regular intervals and at times which tenants find most convenient might achieve more than one which holds ten meetings all grouped in the final quarter of the year and at times of day that prevent some tenants taking part.

**Why?** Asking why something was done or is being planned is a very powerful question. People probably don’t ask ‘Why’ enough perhaps because were afraid of looking childish. It can take a bit of confidence to ask Why, but the answer is very often worth the trouble; it can be very revealing.
Whether? There are usually a number of ways of achieving a similar result. Try asking whether there were/are alternatives; what they involved; and whether what was done was the best use of resources and the best way of doing the job?

What else? Nearly everything we do has an impact beyond that which we intend. For example: when a tenant gets advice on rent arrears, they might also need advice on benefits and a range of other issues. Skilled workers and managers don’t just do the job in hand, they look at what else needs doing, or could be done, at the same time.

Asking these questions – How? Where? Who? When? Why? Whether there were alternatives? and What else happened or needs to happen? – can help to reveal much more from any piece of information, statement or statistic.

A Learning Cycle
Another set of questions that is useful to think about when you want to learn how, and whether, something has worked and what lessons are to be learnt is:

- What? Find out as precisely and thoroughly as you can what happened.
- So What? Work out how what happened fits in with what else is going on and what else needs doing?
- Now What? Focus on what are the next steps how do we apply what we have learnt from the experience?

This set of questions asked in the order above is the basis of a model of how people and groups learn called the Learning Cycle. It has been observed that organisations are often very good at asking themselves the What and So What questions. And often very bad at asking Why and Now What questions. Asking What; Why; So What; and Now What in that order, can help organisations to question the way they do things; to learn from experience; and to find new approaches that work better.
2.2 HLBs as Tenant Panels

Once an HLB receives its kitemark from City HLB and the Council, it is recognised as a tenant panel for the purposes of coregulation. Government has not set out strict rules that dictate how tenant panels should work. It has said that tenants and landlord should decide what works best locally. The government asked national bodies representing tenants to come up with guidance for tenant panels. This was published as ‘Tenant Panels: Options for Accountability’ in 2012 with the support of the government.

The guidance gives a set of principles which HLBs and similar bodies in other parts of the country should work to. They suggest that as well as having the information and skills to play a part in coregulating the Councils performance the standards set by the Homes and Communities Agency, tenant panels should:

- exercise and develop tenant leadership
- ensure fairness and access for all
- develop and use effective structures and adequate support.

For the most part, the guidance suggests things which HLBs are already able to show they do. In some places, however, HLBs may need to be strengthened and supported to play their role in coregulation as effective tenant panels.

HLBs and Tenant Leadership

The guidance says that tenant panels can include people who are not the Council’s housing service users (that is, tenants and leaseholders). They can as HLBs do – include other residents. The guidance, however, makes it clear that everyone involved in a tenant panel must understand their role, purpose and responsibility and their accountability to tenants as a whole. The guidance suggests HLBs should:

- think independently and be able to challenge the landlord effectively
- assess and develop the skills, confidence and know-how of their members
- be able and willing to engage with, and learn from, the tenants they represent and from good practice developed elsewhere.

HLBs, Access and Fairness

The guidance says that tenant panels involved in coregulation should be run according to equality and diversity principles. HLBs should be open to all tenants and work in accordance with accepted standards in fairness and conduct. In particular, HLBs should:

- seek to understand and reflect the diverse views of all tenants and service users
- be accessible to all tenants so that they can raise issues through them and join them as members
- have an agreed Code of Conduct which is used and enforced.
HLB Structures and Support
According to the guidance, HLBs – as tenant panels – must be properly structured and resourced to be able to carry out their work. That means HLBs should:

• Have clearly defined and agreed structures in terms of constitution, rules and policies

• Review the structures and their performance to see that they are working effectively

• Be supported with sufficient money, time and expertise to be able to do the work expected of them.

Birmingham City Council and City HLB produced, in 2014, an agreement listing the support that HLBs need to work properly as tenant panels for coregulation. HLBs and local housing teams will be able to refer to the agreement to make sure that HLBs are supported well across the city.

2.3 Projects And Campaigns
Projects and campaigns are ways in which HLBs work with others to make the neighbourhood a better place to live. When HLBs talk about ‘projects’ they are referring to the things they fund using budgets provided by the Council. These projects are usually small-scale environmental improvements and work to improve community safety:

• concrete bollards to prevent inconsiderate parking

• trip rails or railings around areas of planting or communal space

• developing a patch of land as a community garden or food-growing site

• improvements to streetlighting and CCTV cameras

• security fencing and alley gating

• providing dropped kerbs

• providing litter bins and recycling bins

HLBs can also support community projects like work with local young people. Anyone can suggest projects for consideration by HLBs, but the funding available is limited. Decisions about how it is used are made by HLB members.

HLBs can take up campaigns over issues which affect their members. These might be about informing tenants of changes in policy; helping the Council to consult and involve tenants; or they could be aimed at improving services or changing policies. HLBs can work together to campaign for changes in policies or services delivered by the Council. They can campaign for improvements from other local public services or about issues affecting tenants that are decided by the Government, for example the reform of welfare benefits.

To be effective, HLBs manage projects and campaigns in an orderly way. That includes having a systematic approach, recording: aims and objectives; who is responsible for them; allocations of funding and time and actual spending on them; and progress over time. This applies to any activities the HLB organises projects, consultation events, information campaigns or campaigns to change policies or the way services are delivered.
2.4 Estate Walkabouts and Assessments

Estate walkabouts are an important way in which HLBs work with the local Housing Team to improve local conditions. An estate walkabout is where housing staff, HLB members and others come together on a joint inspection of the neighbourhood to see what needs doing or improving. Other people involved in walkabouts can include: other tenants and residents as well as representatives of Council contractors and departments, the police and other public services.

Walkabouts are intended to get to the bottom of problems in an area – they depend for their success on the local knowledge which residents can provide. Working with housing staff, tenants can identify important issues and agree actions and priorities. They can cover things like: grass cutting and communal areas; recycling and cleaning; car parking and traffic; security and emergency safety; or antisocial behaviour. HLB members can raise the issues they want.

Walkabouts should be conducted regularly, eg each month. They each cover an area which the Council defines as an estate. Estates aren’t all the same size and they can have varying proportions of council to non-council properties. Some HLBs cover just one estate others may cover several. The results of past walkabouts and a schedule for ones in future is included as an item for discussion at each HLB meeting. HLBs work with the local housing team to plan walkabouts and draw their attention to areas which need it. HLBs also review the results of walkabouts and chase up what action has taken place as a result.

Every six months, the estate walkabout doubles as a more formal assessment. During an estate assessment, the group does a walkabout and scores the standard of the local neighbourhood and its services. These scores are published and form part of the assessment of how well the Council is doing in its role as landlord. Having HLB members take part in walkabouts and assessments and listening to what they have to say about the estate is part of the coregulation of the Councils services.
2.5 Representation and Communication
As well as pushing for practical improvements, HLBs need ways of representing people and communicating with them and with others on their behalf. ‘Representation’ means presenting a case on behalf of someone else or a wider group of people. The people who do the job of representation are called representatives. In this sense, HLB members are representatives of tenants and leaseholders.

‘Representative’, however, has two other meanings which only apply in part to HLBs and their members:

- we say something is representative of something else when it looks like it, or is in some other way ‘typical of’ a larger thing. Whilst HLB members need to be in touch with a broad range of tenants and leaseholders in their area, they need not, be perfectly representative in the sense of exactly mirroring the wider population of service users.

- we call people – like councillors – who we vote for to represent us, ‘elected representatives’. HLB members are elected at a public meeting, but they are not representatives in the sense that councillors are.

So, HLBs and their members are representative: because of what they do (put the case for tenants and leaseholders); not because of who they are; or how many people turn up to vote for them. Being an effective representative depends on how well HLBs and their members communicate (both listening and speaking) with:

- tenants, leaseholders and residents in the area
- the Council (not just Housing) and other services, such as the Police.

HLBs and their members have a number of ways in which they can listen and speak to the service users they represent. First, and most important, is the informal conversation that they get by living in an area and taking part in community life. But public meetings matter too – they provide ways for other residents to have a say. Increasingly, ‘social media’ – websites, Twitter, Facebook and bulletin boards – create opportunities for conversation too.
More than four in five (86%) of UK adults now use the internet. That includes 95% of people earning less than £200 per week. Online communication websites and social media is as important to HLBs as it is to the Council or private businesses.

The website for HLBs in Birmingham is at [www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved). That website belongs to City HLB which is made up of representatives from each of the recognised HLBs in the city.

Each HLB website provides the following:

- a map showing the area covered by the HLB
- a calendar or list of meetings
- archive of current HLB minutes
- a contact form which enables anyone to enquire about membership or the activities of the HLB.

Each HLB can also use their site if they want to:

- post news stories, pictures, video and audio clips showing what the HLB is doing, the projects it has funded and campaigns it is involved in
- list links to the websites of other local groups, other bodies representing tenants and sources of further information and advice for tenants
- pick up and display feeds from other websites, Facebook pages or feeds from Twitter so that the site can be integrated into other online activity by the HLB and its members, etc
- set up forums, polls and other interactive content.

Some HLBs use Twitter as a way of engaging tenants including by, for example, having observers tweet live from HLB meetings. If you do want to report what is happening at an HLB meeting – whether you use Twitter or any other way of telling people about it – you should first ask the Chair and the members whether they mind. You should always check with people before you take a picture or record video of them.
2.6 Partnership and Influence

HLBs represent the interests of tenants and leaseholders through:

- tenant participation – engaging with the Council over its policies and plans as the landlord
- working alongside place managers and wider neighbourhood management
- coregulation of the Council’s housing services against standards set for it including in the Council’s Tenant Quality Promise
- engaging with cabinet members, locally elected members and the structures they have set up for the strategic management of housing
- working with other HLBs, City HLB and the wider tenants movement.

In each case, representing tenants and leaseholders means working with other groups and organisations. An HLB can meet regularly, take reports and agree project spending – but if no one else knows about it, it isn’t really doing the job of representing tenants. Influence depends on getting to know people in other organisations. It means using those links to influence decisions. HLBs need, over time, to be able to influence and work with:

- the local housing team headed by the Place Manager and contractors working for the Council
- community groups, residents’ associations and neighbourhood forums
- the police, local health services, housing associations and local schools
- City HLB, other local HLBs and other tenants groups.

One way to make a start is for HLB members to pool what they already know. The local housing team can help with contact information for other groups and services. You might decide to: make a list (or a map or directory) for the area and keep it updated; invite observers and guest speakers from other organisations to HLB meetings; follow people and organisational feeds on Twitter; set up links to their websites from your website; and - every month or so – email a good news story to people (eg about a project the HLB has done).
2.7 City HLB
City Housing Liaison Board (City HLB) is a consultative body between tenants and leaseholders; and councillors and Council officers. It exists to influence and advise the Council’s decision making relating to issues affecting tenants and leaseholders. It can take up cases which have not been resolved locally by an HLB working with the local Housing Team. It can help HLBS jointly to co-regulate Council services.

City HLB keeps the HLB Standard up-to-date and uses it in advising the Council whether an HLB should be recognised and supported. Meetings of City HLB are held in public usually at the Council House in Victoria Square.

Members of City HLB are:

• one representative from each recognised HLB;

• a representative of another recognised group of tenants and residents in the area, where there is no HLB;

• a representative from each Tenant Managed Organisation with more than 500 Council properties;

• one councillor from each political party with seats on the Council (in addition to any councillors who may also be HLB representatives).

Members are elected, or nominated, annually by their HLBS. They elect a City HLB Chair and Vice Chair every 2 years.

City HLB can set up and agree the terms of reference for sub-groups called Service Improvement Groups. These are made up of HLB members (not necessarily City HLB reps), councillors and anyone else City HLB members decide to include. Service Improvement Groups look into particular issues agreed by City HLB and report back to City HLB every four months. The chairs of the Service Improvement Groups – along with the City HLB Chair and Vice Chair – form an Agenda Committee. The Agenda Committee decides on the agenda at City HLB meetings. City HLB reviews the Service Improvement Groups it needs each year.
Part 3: Getting better all the time
HLBs are taking on important new jobs: housing coregulation; new links to districts with devolved power over tenant engagement. And 2015 will see the launch of a kitemark which City HLB and Birmingham City Council will award to HLBs to show they meet the standards expected of them. That includes meeting legal requirements, of course, but it also means being committed to becoming even more accountable to service users and to improving the quality and effectiveness with which HLBs work. Both City HLB and Birmingham City Council provide support for HLBs and HLB members to do the job and to get even better at it.

3.1 Accountability, Quality, Training and Development
HLBs belong to their members and people who might want to join as members in future. That means they are, first and foremost, accountable to tenants and leaseholders not councillors; not council officers; not City HLB.

In practice, HLBs are accountable to tenants and leaseholders by:

- Making sure that any service user in the area can get in touch with the HLB; and that they can find out what the HLB is doing. Setting up an HLB website and keeping it updated with contact information, meeting dates and meeting notes is an important way of doing this.

- Enabling any resident to attend HLB meetings as an observer; co-opting members on to the HLB who are enthusiastic and who help the HLB to be more broadly representative of tenants and leaseholders in the area.

- Holding an annual meeting at which they give a report on what the HLB has done during the year; and, every other year, enabling tenants and leaseholders to be nominated, and elected, to serve as HLB members.

Quality means being able to do the job that is intended. For HLBs, it means doing the things set out in this guide. In their annual reports, HLBs review how well they have done; and how they could do even better. That includes reviewing the help HLB members may need as individuals and as a team. The Council can fund things that help HLBs improve the way they work. This includes paying for things like training courses for HLB chairs and support for HLBs to organise meetings and update their website etc.
City HLB represents the interests of HLBs from across Birmingham. Alongside local tenants and leaseholders and the Council, it has an interest in helping HLBs do well: it wants to show that HLBs are effective and respected. Representatives of HLBs agree standards at City HLB. Together with the Council, City HLB awards a kitemark to HLBs which live up to these standards. City HLB reviews the award of a kitemark to an HLB every two years, or more frequently if needed.

3.2 HLB Kitemark
The Kitemark awarded to HLBs that meet the standards agreed by City HLB is:

The Kitemark is jointly awarded by City HLB and Birmingham City Council. It shows that an HLB is recognised:

- as a member of City HLB entitled to send a representative to its meetings
- as the Councils partner in co-regulating the standard of housing services it provides
- and is entitled to the support set out in the agreement between City HLB and the Council about support for HLBs.

3.3 Legal and Financial Issues
An HLB is an unincorporated association. That means it is a body to which people choose to belong; which is defined by a set of rules (the Constitution and policies agreed by members); and it has no legal identity separate from its members. HLB members may be personally liable for decisions they take. This means that HLB members should take at least the same care as they would over decisions they make in their own private lives.

The Council helps HLBs deal with legal and money matters. It takes on responsibility for the consequences of how an HLB spends project money. If anyone chooses to sue for damages as the result of an HLB project, they would sue the Council, not the HLB. This doesn’t mean that HLBs should act carelessly. HLB members may still be liable for decisions they take that might damage other people’s interests. HLBs must take care, for example, not to:

- Endanger anyones life, health, property etc.
- Defame other people that means making comments about other people which you cannot show are true and which cause them damage
- Compromise other peoples privacy
- Expose children, young people or vulnerable adults to risks which they may not be able to manage.
To help safeguard members and others, the rules and policies of an HLB should make it clear that it:

- Has a consultative relationship with the Council (an HLB advises, but it can’t instruct the Council). HLB members are not responsible for (nor can they control) the actions of the Council.

- Keeps and uses fairly a code of conduct including rules which enable it to suspend and exclude members who bring it into disrepute.

- Does not hold, or deal with, personal information except that held on members which is needed to run the HLB (eg to call meetings etc).

- Has no power to organise activities involving regular and unsupervised contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults.

The rules on the previous page should not, however, be used as excuses for stopping an HLB carrying out, with care, the activities it needs to. HLBs have important jobs to carry out – including helping to make sure that the money people pay in rents and service charges is used in the right way. It would be an abuse to try to use rules spuriously to stop HLBs and service users having proper overview over the way public money is spent.

HLB members, council officers and councillors need to watch out for when laws and rules are applied over-cautiously as well as for when they may be too lax, eg:

- Health and Safety rules should not necessarily be used to prevent HLBs from choosing to spend money on projects which may pose some minor, manageable risk.

- Worries about defamation should not mean stopping HLBs reporting factual statements about what people have done and how it may have affected, or affect, the interests of tenants and leaseholders.

- Data Protection should not be an excuse for failing to provide HLBs with the information they need (suitably anonymised) to carry out their work helping the Council to co-regulate housing.

- Safeguarding concerns should not be used to prevent HLBs from involving children, young people and vulnerable adults in their activities – so long as adequate safeguards are in place.

On this last point, some HLBs may decide that they want members to undergo a Disclosure & Barring check (what used to be called a CRB check). HLBs can request the Council to initiate these checks. Neither City HLB nor the Council, however, requires these checks. The Council must have sound justification for initiating any such checks and is therefore unlikely to agree to making them in respect of members of HLBs, bearing in mind that HLB members are not required to have regular unsupervised contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults.
3.4 Open, honest, transparent and inclusive
HLB members must not abuse their position to gain special treatment, money or benefits that are not otherwise due to them. HLBs have a Code of Conduct which is agreed by the members. The Code of Conduct is based on the Nolan Principles of Standards in Public Life. HLB members are expected to show:

Selflessness – they should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not use their position to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity – they should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in their role as HLB members.

Objectivity – in carrying out HLB business. The decisions made by HLB members for example over the use of project funding - should be on the merits of the case.

Accountability – HLB members are subject to election every two years and HLBs produce an annual report which is made widely available. HLBs work with City HLB to maintain accountability.

Openness – HLBs are as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They publish the results of their decision making by making copies of meeting notes available and enabling people to attend meetings as observers whenever possible.

Honesty – HLB members have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership by example – HLB members promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

HLBs have the power to suspend, or exclude, from membership anyone who fails to uphold these principles or brings the HLB into disrepute according to terms set out in the code of conduct. City HLB has similar powers to suspend or exclude from its membership, any HLB which does not uphold these principles or which brings the HLB movement into disrepute.
Get involved

If you live in Birmingham – and in particular if you’re a Council tenant or leaseholder – then you can get involved in Housing Liaison Boards. If you’re already active in your HLB, then hopefully the Guide will be useful as a source of ideas and information and do have a look at the HLB website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved

If you’re not yet a member, you can check to see if there is an HLB in your area online at www.birmingham.gov.uk/getinvolved or by contacting your local housing office (see the numbers listed under More Information). If there isn’t an HLB in your area and you are a Council tenant or leaseholder, then you can help set one up. Contact your local housing office for help.
More information

Abbreviations and Jargon
We tried to keep the jargon to a minimum in writing the Guide, but some abbreviations and specialist words are inevitable. Here is what they mean:

‘Biennial meeting’
A meeting that each HLB holds every 2 years at which members are elected

City HLB
The body made up of representatives from HLBs in Birmingham which agrees the standard for them

‘coregulation’
HLBs and the Council working together to ensure that housing services are good quality and value for money

‘Districts’
Ten areas which Birmingham is divided into and at which level the Council is engaging with communities on local needs and priorities and where services can be held to account

HLB
Housing Liaison Board

‘service user’
Council tenant or leaseholder or member of their household

‘social media’
Ways people have of talking to each other which they own themselves websites and Facebook pages, Twitter etc

Tenant Panel
The term used in law for bodies like HLBs which represent tenants in the coregulation of their housing

TPO
Tenant Participation Officer

TQP
Tenant Quality Promise the standard of service the Council commits to provide to its tenants
Birmingham City Council Housing Contacts

**Edgbaston** – including Bartley Green, Harborne and Quinton
Housing Services, Edgbaston District, Monmouth Road, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3LX
edgbaston@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
Jennie Carter, Edgbaston Housing Team, Bartley Green Housing Office, Monmouth Road, Bartley Green, Birmingham B32 3LX
jennifer.a.carter@birmingham.gov.uk
Telephone 0121 303 5359
Mobile Number 07766 922460

**Erdington** – including Oscott, Kingstanding, Stockland Green and Tyburn
Erdington District Housing Team, 599-603 College Road, Kingstanding, Birmingham B44
erdington@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
Emma Batterham, North Quadrant Housing Team, 599-603 College Road, Kingstanding, Birmingham B44 0AY
emma.batterham@birmingham.gov.uk
Telephone 0121 303 1952
Mobile Number 07766 922095

**Hall Green** – including Moseley, Kings Heath, Springfield and Sparkbrook
Yardley Housing Team, Rear of 146 Lea Hall Road, Stechford, Birmingham B33 8JT
houhallgreenhousingteam@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
Angela Mayne, Yardley Wood Neighbourhood Office, Rear of 146 Lea Hall Road, Stechford, Birmingham B33 8JT
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Telephone 0121 675 6098
Mobile Number 07825 282516

**Hodge Hill** – including Washwood Heath, Bordesley Green and Shard End
hodgehill@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
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Ladywood – including Aston, Nechells and Soho
Ladywood Housing Team, Ladywood Neighbourhood Office, Botany Walk, Ladywood, Birmingham B16 8ED
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Tenant Participation:
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Telephone Munasif Mohammed: 0121 675 9903
Mobile Number Munasif Mohammed: 07533 240921
Telephone Evangeline Cripps: 0121 464 1614
Mobile Number Evangeline Cripps: 07775 024712

Northfield – including Longbridge, Frankley, Weoley and Kings Norton
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northfield.housing@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
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nadeen.justice@birmingham.gov.uk
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Mobile Number 07824 694315

Perry Barr – including Handsworth and Lozells
Perry Barr District Housing Team, Tamebridge House, Level 3, Aldridge Road, Birmingham B42 2TZ
perrybarr@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
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sharon.gayle@birmingham.gov.uk
Telephone 0121 303 3074

Selly Oak – including Billesley, Bournville, Brandwood and Druids Heath
Housing Services, Monmouth Road, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3LX
sellyoak@birmingham.gov.uk

Tenant Participation:
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**Sutton Coldfield**
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Tenant Participation:
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Mobile Number 07766 922095

**Yardley** – including Acocks Green, Sheldon and Stechford
Yardley Housing Team, rear 146 Lea Hall Road, Lea Hall, Birmingham B33 8JT
yardleydistrict@birmingham.gov.uk

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The purpose of this agreement will be to set out the support Birmingham City Council will give to Housing Liaison Boards and similar bodies it, and City HLB, jointly recognise as acting as Tenant Panels involved in co-regulating BCC social housing. (Leaseholders are tenants for the purposes of this document.)

1. Regulatory role of Tenant Panels

1.1 Regulatory Consumer Standards
Birmingham City Council is subject to a Regulatory Framework set by the Homes and Communities Agency. This framework includes four consumer standards dealing with how the Council manages social housing:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment: tenant information, complaints, opportunities for tenant involvement and empowerment, equalities and diversity
- Decent Homes: the quality of accommodation, repairs and maintenance
- Tenancies allocations, lettings and exchanges and tenancy agreements
- The Wider Neighbourhood and Community estate and neighbourhood management, anti-social behaviour and joined-up working.

1.2 Co-regulation of Standards
The Localism Act gives landlords and tenants the job jointly of making sure regulatory consumer standards are met. The assumption is that Tenant Panels will work with the landlord unless there is a risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants. If there is the risk of physical harm, financial loss or some other serious damage or risk to tenants or potential tenants, then Tenant Panels can ask the Homes and Communities Agency to step in.

1.3 Tenant Panels
Government has not defined tightly what a tenant panel should look like. It has, however, issued guidance which set out some key principles. Tenant Panels should:

- have access to the information and skills they need to be effective in co-regulation
- exercise and develop tenant leadership
- ensure fairness and access for all
- develop and use effective structures and adequate support.

2. Support For Tenant Panels

2.1 Co-regulation at Local, District and City Levels
Birmingham City Council has devolved a wide range of (but not all) decisions about local services, including housing, to its District Committees. In practice, many decisions are also made at ward and estate level by managers who are accountable to District-based decision makers. Some decisions continue to be made at city-wide level. There are three levels at which tenant panels may be involved in co-regulation in Birmingham:

- Local i.e. ward or estate-level
- District level
- City-wide level

Appendix

Birmingham City Council: Commitment to Tenant Engagement

The purpose of this agreement will be to set out the support Birmingham City Council will give to Housing Liaison Boards and similar bodies it, and City HLB, jointly recognise as acting as Tenant Panels involved in co-regulating BCC social housing. (Leaseholders are tenants for the purposes of this document.)
HLBs (including TMOs and other bodies recognised by the Council and City HLB as equivalent to HLBs) will act as tenant panels at ward or estate level. They will coordinate and agree with District Committees the approach to co-regulation at District level. As members of City HLB, they will be involved in co-regulation at city-wide level.

Birmingham City Council will support HLBs and HLB members to co-regulate at local, District and City levels by providing or arranging if required and as reasonable:

- access to meeting rooms
- transport to and from meetings or the payment of travel expenses
- secretariat services keeping meeting notes and circulating meeting papers etc
- an HLB website
- meeting space and assistance in organising annual meetings
- event space and assistance in organising social events
- support for District-level arrangements, e.g. HLB meetings, District Chairs Forums

and in specific ways set out in more detail in the following sub-sections.

2.2 Information and Skills

HLBs and HLB members need key information and the skills needed to make sense of and apply that information critically in order to carry out their co-regulatory role.

Birmingham City Council will support HLBs and HLB members by providing and arranging as requested:

- regular information in written form and in agreed formats relating to the performance of housing services covering in particular Tenant Involvement and Empowerment; Decent Homes; Tenancies; and Wider Estate and Neighbourhood Management
- assistance in the interpretation of such information
- training in performance management
- access to, and a part in determining the schedule for, neighbourhood walkabouts, which will be attended by landlord services on a monthly basis.
- access to and information relating to estate assessments, the results of which, will be fed back to all those involved.

2.3 Tenant Leadership

HLBs can include people who are not the housing service users (i.e. not tenants or leaseholders). Everyone involved in an HLB, however, must understand their role, purpose and responsibility and their accountability to tenants as a whole. They must be tenant-led and should be able to exercise that leadership including by challenging the City Council and building their capacity and the capacity of their members to lead and challenge effectively. HLBs should be able to engage with, and learn from, the tenants they represent and from good practice developed elsewhere.

Birmingham City Council will support HLBs and HLB members by providing and arranging as requested:

- support for City HLB including its membership and affiliation to bodies such as ARCH and other third party sources of support, information and advice
• training and support in representation, leadership and chairing skills
• training and support in influencing and negotiation skills
• access to training and support in using the HLB website and social media
• support for engagement by HLBs with service users
• support for learning by HLBs from Tenant Panels and similar bodies elsewhere.

2.4 Access and Fairness
HLBs must be run according to equality and diversity principles; they should be open to all tenants and work in accordance with accepted standards in fairness and conduct. In particular, HLBs should:

• seek to understand and reflect the diverse views of all tenants and service users
• be accessible to all tenants so that they can raise issues through them and join them as members
• have an agreed Code of Conduct which is used and enforced.

Birmingham City Council will support HLBs and HLB members by providing and arranging:

• help keeping membership records and facilitating HLB membership and mailing lists
• help in conducting regular elections including presiding over elections
• ensuring that HLB membership and involvement is presented positively and as part of the wider menu of opportunities for involvement
• support in revising, updating and enforcing the Code of Conduct
• support in resolving disputes by way of the Your Views procedure
• ensuring that HLB meetings and decisions are publicised to the wider community of service users including through the HLB website.

2.5 Structures and Support
HLBs must be properly structured and resourced to be able to carry out their work. That means they should:

• Have clearly defined and agreed structures in terms of constitution, rules and policies
• Review the structures and their performance to see that they are working effectively
• Be supported with sufficient money, time and expertise to be able to do the work expected of them.

Birmingham City Council will support HLBs and HLB members by providing and arranging:

• support in revising, updating and using constitutions and policies including through an HLB Guide book
• maintenance of an HLB Kitemark and the process for reviewing HLB structures and performance that will support it
• access to and support in identifying suitable projects for the use of the Community Improvement budgets.