



# Tenant Participation Strategy

2017 – 2022





# FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce our tenant participation strategy.

This strategy sets out how Ark Housing will involve tenants in the design, delivery and continuous improvement of our services over the next five years.

We strongly believe that one of the most effective ways of improving services is to provide more opportunities for tenants to become actively involved in what we do. We were very pleased to offer all tenants and key stakeholders an opportunity to participate in the development of this strategy and have incorporated their views and general observations into the final document.

This five year strategy sets out our ideas and aspirations in regard to tenant participation. It establishes a robust tenant involvement framework that will allow you to become involved in our business at whatever level you wish.

Involvement can mean as little as providing regular feedback to our satisfaction surveys, or by becoming more involved in your local residents group.

You may also wish to register with us to be consulted on new policies which may affect you, or you may simply just wish to avail of more opportunities to express your opinion in respect to how we deliver our services.

There are a number of engagement avenues open to you through this strategy, and as such we welcome your views and ideas on the same.

Should you wish to discuss how you can become more involved in the work that we do we would like to hear from you. Even the simplest idea could help improve our services.



**Jim McShane**  
Chief Executive (Acting)



# BACKGROUND

Since its formation in 1987, Ark Housing has always sought the views of its tenants. In 2002, 2009, and 2014 we revised our tenant participation policies in response to good practise, changing attitudes, and evolving regulatory requirements and this strategy builds on that history.

We support and encourage the formation of residents groups, carry out surveys in respect to our services, and consult on specific areas such as our planned maintenance programme and service charge levels.

However, we recognise that we need to do more. We hope that by setting out specific objectives in this strategy, and by committing the resources necessary to deliver it, that we will be able to achieve our ambition to have tenants at the heart of what we do as an organisation.

## **The Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland**

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

This strategy sets out the Departments' vision of tenant participation and is drawn from best practise from across Ireland and the UK. It

provides guidance to all social housing providers in Northern Ireland in respect to how their model of participation should look as well as sets out for you, clear and unambiguous information about what kind of engagement you should expect from your social housing provider.

Ultimately the Tenant Participation Strategy for Northern Ireland aims to improve the quality of social housing services for social housing tenants and landlords right across Northern Ireland and we hope that Ark Housing's Tenant Participation Strategy 2017 – 2022 will help support and contribute to that wider ambition.

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

***[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)***

***or by contacting the Department for Communities directly:***

***Housing Regulation Project Team  
Department For Communities  
Third Floor, Lighthouse Building  
Gasworks Business Park, Belfast, BT7 2GB***

***Tel: 028 9082 9044***

***Text phone: 028 9052 9304***

***[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)***

## INTRODUCTION

In its Corporate Strategy, Ark Housing is committed to providing service excellence and improving the lives of others. We recognise that the best way to achieve this outcome is through meaningful engagement and participation with tenants and communities. Our Tenant Participation Strategy is designed to be inclusive and empowering and we hope that in partnership with us we can shape the services of the future together.



## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

### **The aims of this strategy are:**

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

### **The objectives of this strategy are:**

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





## **HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE OUR STRATEGIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES?**

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

Have developed an action plan which sets out the key milestones to be delivered;

Will regularly monitor, review, update and report on the strategy and associated action plan;

Have committed the necessary resources to deliver the strategy.

# SUPPORTING TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND COMMITTING RESOURCES

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

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

Our employees are committed to tenant involvement and significant resourcing has been committed by the organisation in terms of staff time and financial support in order to deliver this strategy.

Our employees will attend Tenants group meetings where invited and will support groups to flourish and individuals to develop within their roles.

Ark Housing has an annual budget set aside for tenant involvement activities, running from April to March of each year.

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

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

Tenant groups which are not yet fully established can also be supported by us as they go through the process of establishing themselves.

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

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

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

The tenant participation budget will generally include funding for the following activities:

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

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

## ***Other sources of reference and good practice for Tenant Participation***

### ***Supporting Communities NI***

***34-36 Henry Street***

***Ballymena***

***BT42 3AH***

***Tel. 028 25645676***

***Email: info@supportingcommunities.org***

# LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

We recognise that not everyone wants to engage with us in the same way.

We recognise that some tenants may only be interested in providing feedback to us in relation to standards of service. However others may be interested in having a say in how our policies and practises are developed or how we perform as a social housing provider.

We have therefore built into our participation model a “menu” of participation levels that are available to each and every tenant.

These participation levels are summarised below:



## **Level 1: Information and Communication**

You receive regular information, participate in surveys, provide feedback and keep us up to date on how to communicate with you.

## **Level 2: Group Structure**

You help set up and participate in the local tenants groups. You also participate in the organisation and planning of social activities in the community.

## **Level 3: Formal Based Tenant Group**

You participate in a broader Tenant’s Forum which looks at the work of the Association, scrutinises our activities and policies and engages in our business for the benefit of all tenants.

## **Level 4: Governance Structure**

You agree to serve on the Board of Ark Housing having influence in its strategic direction and how it is governed.

***Further information on the levels of participation is detailed on the following pages.***

# LEVEL 1: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Ark Housing provides you with regular information on performance standards, service satisfaction levels, latest news, and on all matters which relate to the services we deliver. This is done through residents meetings, website, annual report, intermittent mail shots, personal letters and face to face meetings.

We will over the lifetime of this strategy enhance these communications methods to include email, text messaging, social media and smart phone applications.



## Tenant Influence

Just by engaging with us at this level, and by taking an interest in how we perform, you can provide the platform that influences and enables us to improve. For example, by simply responding to our annual tenant satisfaction survey, you will give us a steer on how to make improvements to the services you receive.

## Tenant Commitment

Level 1 does not involve a great deal of commitment but can bring many benefits.

We would ask that you take the time to:

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

## Tenant Benefits

- ✓ You will help deliver service improvement;
- ✓ You will help us meet your needs through communication and information that is available when you need it;
- ✓ You will help us meet our environmental goals in the production of less waste paper;
- ✓ You will help us achieve value for money and in return keep rents and services charges low.

## LEVEL 2: GROUP STRUCTURE

Over the lifetime of this strategy we aim to have in place at least 4 Tenants' Groups.

Local tenants groups can not only have a greater impact on influencing service delivery, but can also impact positively on the broader community as well as enhancing your own personal organisational skills.

Ark Housing is committed to providing tenants groups with training and financial support to help get up and running.

### Tenant Influence

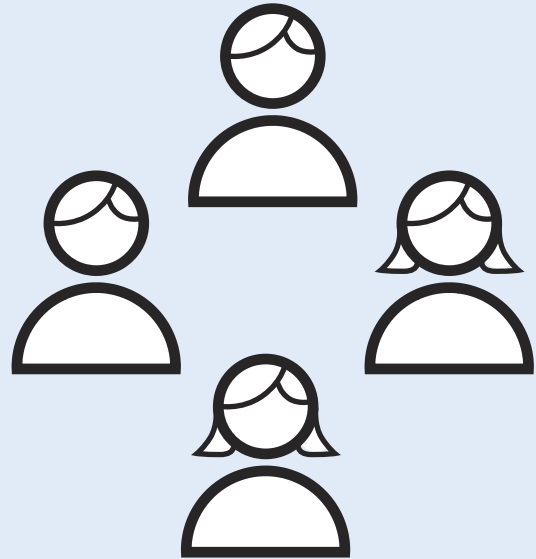
Local groups can have a much greater say in how we deliver and improve our services.

Groups also tend to have a greater influence in the improvement of their scheme as a whole by lobbying the landlord collectively on behalf of everyone.

### Tenant Commitment

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

- Being involved in organising or attending regular meetings;
- Being involved in organising or attending community activities;
- Representing tenants at Ark Housing focus groups and other such activities;



*"We are actively seeking to build a register of tenants who may be interested in becoming more involved in their local tenants group, or who may wish to set one up in their scheme. If this is something you would like to explore further please contact us by any of the usual means as outlined on page 19 where we will be happy to take any questions".*

### Tenant Benefits

Through a group structure you will:

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

## LEVEL 3: FORMAL TENANT BASED GROUP

Over the lifetime of this strategy we aim to help establish a more formal tenant based group called The Tenant's Forum. Tenants Forums, where effective can scrutinise performance, help develop policy, and can lead on initiatives to improve our organisation for the betterment of all its tenants.

### Tenant Influence

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

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

### Tenant Commitment

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

- Being involved in regular meetings;
- Being involved in reviewing policy and providing feedback;
- Attending formal meetings with the Association;
- Attending conferences, seminars or training;
- Reporting back to tenants on certain issues;



*"We are actively seeking to build a register of tenants who may be interested in becoming more involved in the work of the association at this level. If this is something you would like to explore further please contact us by any of the usual means as outlined on page 19, or at [info@arkhousing.co.uk](mailto:info@arkhousing.co.uk) where we will be happy to take any questions".*

### Tenant Benefits

Through more formal group structures, tenants can;

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

## LEVEL 4: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Ark Housing is Governed by a Board who volunteer their time in the interests of meeting housing need, strengthening communities and enhancing social justice.

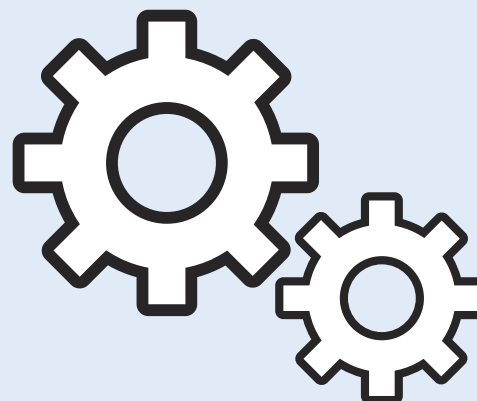
Over the lifetime of the strategy we aim to establish a structure or mechanism to enable Ark Housing tenants to become involved with the work of the organisation at Board level so we can realise the added benefits that this can bring.

### Tenant Influence

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

***“Are you interested in registering your interest in becoming a member of the Board of Ark Housing? Do you have the necessary skills or experience in third sector governance or wish to develop those skills further?”***

***If this is something you would like to explore further please contact us by any of the usual means as outlined on page 19, or at [info@arkhousing.co.uk](mailto:info@arkhousing.co.uk) where we will be happy to take any questions”.***



### Tenant Commitment

Board member's would be required to commit to:

- At least 4 Board meetings annually;
- At least 6 other days per year for reviewing strategy or performance or attending training or committee meetings;

### Tenant Benefits

The benefits of having tenants on management boards include:

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







# DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

Ark Housing will develop an annual action plan which will assist us in delivering the overall 5 year Tenant Participation Strategy.

Each action plan will contain specific actions and key performance indicators for the association to achieve annually.

A copy of the annual action plan can be obtained by contacting us as outlined on page 19.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

**Ark Housing will monitor and evaluate the delivery of this Tenant Participation Strategy by reporting progress against action plan on a regular basis at:**

- Board Meetings
- Committees of the Board
- Senior Executive Team Meetings
- Tenants Forum



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

### Tenants can...

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

# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

**We value involvement that reflects the whole of our tenant population.**

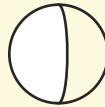
**To this end, and in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we actively seek to remove barriers to tenant participation arising from people with:**



Different religious beliefs



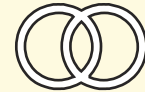
People of different political opinion



People of different racial groups



People of different ages



People of different marital status



People of different sexual orientation



Men and women generally



People with a disability and people without



People with dependents and people without

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

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

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

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

For further information on Ark Housing's Equality Policy and Equality Scheme please contact our office for details.

# SEEKING YOUR VIEWS

Ark Housing is seeking your views on this strategy and welcomes all feedback and questions you may wish to submit to us in respect to the same.

In addition, we are hoping to establish an understanding of how you might wish to become more involved in having a say about how our services are delivered.

There are several ways in which you may do this:

In writing or in person:

**Ark Housing Association**  
**Hawthorn Office Park**  
**37a Stockmans Way**  
**Belfast, BT9 7ET**

**By Telephone: 028 9075 2310**

**By Email: [info@arkhousing.co.uk](mailto:info@arkhousing.co.uk)**

**Twitter: [@arkhousing](https://twitter.com/arkhousing)**

**Website: [www.arkhousing.co.uk](http://www.arkhousing.co.uk)**



***Making a positive  
difference by  
empowering people  
and communities.***



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