



Tenant Participation Strategy 2022-2027



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Chairs' Foreword

As Chair of Ark Housing Association, and Chair of the Ark Housing Association tenant's forum, we are delighted to introduce this Tenant Participation Strategy.

Deep and meaningful customer engagement is essential for the long-term success of every company, and we believe that this strategy provides a strong framework through which Ark Housing can deliver against its wider aspirations around customer service and community development and where Ark Housing's tenants' forum can secure tailored and high-quality services for the people and communities that they represent.

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with tenants, through various structures and events including through the tenants' forum focus groups, and in conversation with those individuals registered on our tenant participation register of interest.

On behalf of Ark Housing and the tenant's forum, we want to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this strategy. We believe that this strategy places Ark Housing's tenants at the heart of the decision-making process and we look forward to not only monitoring the progress and delivery of this over the next five years, but to the exciting times ahead.

Tom Doran

Tom Doran
Chair, Ark Housing Association



Chair, Ark Housing Tenant Forum



1.0 Our Journey So Far

Ark Housing Association was founded by volunteer members of the community determined to make a difference to the standard of housing in their local area. In this respect, Ark Housing has always been community driven and shaped by the community. Over the years, the Association has prided itself on the fact that it was a small community-based organisation and involving its tenants and communities in its activities has always been part of its DNA.

However, in 2017, the Association published its first formal Tenant Participation Strategy. This Strategy cemented the Board's vision to maintain tenant involvement as the Association grew beyond its original community base, and the strategy set out to do three things:

- 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.

Since 2017, we have successfully delivered against each of these goals. As published in our social impact report 2017-2022 **SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT 2017-2022 - Ark Housing**, we had developed a new tenant engagement framework (our menu of involvement), supported the development of the Tenant Forum, established the formation of 3 new local resident's groups, broadened our network of support and community relationships, and committed the resources necessary to drive our tenant participation agenda.

Since its inception in 2020, the tenants' forum has focussed on developing the skills and capacity of its members as well as revising and enhancing its governance structures. Between 2020 and 2022, it had met 13 times and had begun work on several service improvement initiatives.



Corporate Strategy 2017-2022

Engaged Communities and Greater Impact

Development of a Tenant Participation Strategy and Tenant Forum

Introduction of new Floating Support Service (2021)

SOCIAL IMPACT

- Improved communications and engagement with tenants
- Increased tenant involvement in our operations
- Promotion and enhancement of community cohesion
- Increased support for families experiencing or threatened with homelessness

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In November 2022, Supporting Communities (Independent Tenant Organisation) completed an in-depth assessment of Ark Housing's Tenant Participation practices and activities across 10 standards, and we were delighted to become only the second housing association in Northern Ireland to be accredited for its strategic commitment to Tenant Participation.

“I was delighted to be invited to chair the assessment panel for the Ark accreditation submission. The panel was impressed by several activities for example the establishment of the Forum, work with homeless people, and the support and training for staff to ensure tenant participation is being embedded into the culture of Ark. The association freely admits it is a work in progress, and that there is an interesting journey ahead. Ark is to be applauded for going down the route of accreditation and external assessment to support their ambitious improvement plans.”

[Accreditation Independent Panel Member, Lesley Baird]

Over the next five years, we want to embed our successes and build upon them. We want to continue to build relationships both at a grassroots and wider community level, and we want the Tenants Forum to thrive to become influential in everything we do at both a strategic and operational level. By doing so, the Association will hope to achieve “Gold” level accreditation which will recognise and reward those achievements.

2.0 Our Tenant Participation Strategy 2022-2027

This strategy represents a high-level declaration of our commitment towards Tenant Participation and how we intend to achieve our ultimate goal of being a recognised “Gold” standard tenant participation organisation by 2027.



Our Strategic Vision:
Our tenants are at the heart of everything we do.



Our Strategic Goal:
To be an accredited “Gold” standard Tenant Participation organisation.

Our 2027 Strategic Targets:

- To develop and maintain a sustainable tenant engagement framework.**
We recognise that to enhance engagement and participation we must offer a series of options, choices, and opportunities for people to get involved at different levels across our organisation and with varying degrees of commitment. During the implementation of our 2017-22 strategy, we developed our “Menu of Options” framework (Appendix 1). What we aim to do through the implementation of this strategy is to review that framework, assess its effectiveness, assess each of its parts and to explore opportunities where it might be enhanced, and each participatory element better defined. Additionally, we will aim to better define how each participatory element feeds into the various structures of our organisation.
- To establish a standalone sub-department within the housing directorate, committed to the furtherance of tenant participation activities and the delivery of this strategy and its associated action plans.**
We recognise that to provide meaningful engagement, the right level of resources must be committed. Over the course of the next five years, we will agree the necessary resources and structures with a dedicated focus on tenant engagement and community development.
- To contribute to the organisation's Environmental & Decarbonisation Goals**
Through our Tenant Participation and Housing for All activity programmes we will continually champion energy conservation and innovation and the environment, and we will support communities in the development of forward-thinking green initiatives and spaces.
- To improve tenant satisfaction by improving service delivery**
Research has shown that by meaningfully engaging and involving tenants in shaping service delivery, landlords have seen significant benefits, including improved service delivery, improved communication, and greater levels of trust between staff and tenants. Over the next five years we will improve service delivery through the application of tenant led service reviews.



3.0 Strategic Context

Our Corporate Strategy (2022-2027) highlights our commitment to the provision of excellent housing and support services. Strategic Theme 3: Engaged Communities, Greater Impact recognises the benefits of effective engagement and focusses on the desired outcomes and positive indicators relating to the development of tenant participation. The objectives within this strategy link directly to these desired outcomes.

This strategy also reflects the Department for Communities (DfC) **'Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020'**, which sets out the Departments vision for Tenant Participation across Northern Ireland. A key area of the regulatory framework for registered housing associations in Northern Ireland is the Consumer Standard, which focuses on tenants. The Standard considers tenant involvement, complaints, services, and the diverse needs of our tenants. It also considers how we support initiatives that create vibrant communities for all residents.

The 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.

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

www.communitiesni.gov.uk/publications/tenant-participationstrategy-northern-ireland-2015-2020

This Strategy also compliments several of the Association's Operational Strategies including:

- Customer Services Strategy 2022-2027
- Growth Strategy 2022-2027
- Asset Management Strategy
- Environmental & Decarbonisation Strategy 2022-2027

4.0 Equal Opportunities

We have a diverse tenant profile, ranging from general needs tenants to people living in independent living schemes and families within our homeless services. It is, therefore, important that our Tenant Participation Strategy is inclusive and empowering.

We will continually aim to encourage tenants who are under-represented to become involved in various engagement opportunities.

We treat people equally and with respect and promote equality of opportunity, to eliminate discrimination and harassment and to foster good relationships as an organisation, an employer and service provider.

5.0 Measuring & Monitoring Performance

We will set out in our business planning process a series of measurable and specific objections/actions that link directly to the four key strategic targets of this strategy. (Appendix 2)

Additionally, new Tenant Participation Key Performance Indicators will be agreed and monitored on an annual basis.

These business objectives and KPIs will be agreed by the Board in advance of each business year, and they will be reported on regularly to the Board and the tenant's forum. All business plan objectives and KPIs will also be monitored by the Senior Management Team and Performance & Investment Committee on a quarterly basis.

6.0 Review

This strategy will be reviewed annually, monitored quarterly by the Community Investment Manager and the tenant' forum, and evaluated annually by the Board.

Menu of Options

Our **Menu of Options** outlines the range of ways in which we will inform, consult, and engage with our tenants. This has been enhanced following consultation feedback from our tenants and staff, who highlighted the importance of including digital and virtual engagement as another opportunity for our tenants to get involved. For more information on this, please contact Kelly Foster, Community Investment Manager at kelly.foster@arkhousing.co.uk

Below provides a summary of the Menu of options:

Register of Residents Time commitment: As and when required	Sign up to the register and share views from the comfort of your home, with no requirement to attend meetings. This could include feedback through surveys, policy reviews etc.
Digital Engagement Time commitment: As and when required	Engage via email/tenant portal/social media channels or attend meetings through virtual channels such as Zoom.
Estate Walkabouts Time commitment: 2 hours every 6 months	Take part in accompanied estate walkabouts with relevant staff to identify areas of concern or improvement.
Consultations Time commitment: As and when required	Get involved in consultations on planned maintenance work at your home/scheme, service charges, new services, policy changes etc.
Residents Champion Time commitment: 1.5 hours every 6 weeks	Act on behalf of your scheme and meet with Ark Housing staff to provide updates and feedback on housing related matters that have been raised.
Resident Meetings Time commitment: 2 hours every 6 weeks	Represent your scheme (General Needs/ Sheltered/ homeless services on a wide range of issues by being part of an elected resident's group for your area.
Communications Panel Time commitment: 2 hours every 3 months	Meet relevant staff to review information and communication being issued out to tenants and residents and agree whether they can be recommended as 'Tenant Approved'.
Performance Review Panel Time commitment: 2 hours every 3 months	Independently scrutinise and review key services along with other tenants and provide recommendations for improvement to Ark Senior Executive Team.
Tenant Forum Time commitment: 2 hours every 3 months	Participate at a more strategic level by working alongside management staff to shape and improve services for all of Ark Housing tenants.
Ark Housing Board Time required for Board & Committee meetings, including preparation time, is estimated at around 8 hours per quarter.	Tenants will have the opportunity to apply to become members of Ark Housing Board. At this level, you will help influence the organisation's strategic direction and how the organisation is governed. Adhoc attendance at training, conferencing & other events, approximately 4 to 6 days per annum.

Tenant Participation Strategy Action Plan 2022-2027

The following is an action plan for how we will implement the key objectives of the strategy over the next five years.

STRATEGIC TARGET 1

To develop and maintain a sustainable tenant engagement framework:

We recognise that to enhance engagement and participation we must offer a series of options, choices, and opportunities for people to get involved at different levels across our organisation and with varying degrees of commitment. During the implementation of our 2017-22 strategy, we developed our "Menu of Options" framework. What we aim to do through the implementation of this strategy is to review that framework, assess its effectiveness, assess each of its parts and explore opportunities where it might be enhanced, and each participatory element better defined. Additionally, we will aim to better define how each participatory element feeds into the various structures of our organisation.

objective	What we will do	How we will do it	When will we do it
Involvement is accessible and inclusive.	Include information about tenant participation in pre-tenancy materials.	Review current information in pre-tenancy move in materials with tenants and make improvements as required.	Year 1
	Follow up with tenants within 6 weeks of moving into their new home to ensure they are aware of the purpose of tenant participation and provide information on opportunities to get involved.	Include tenant participation in 6 weeks visit checklist.	Year 1
	Increase information online on how to get involved and provide hard copies on request.	Website and online information to be updated regularly and issue hard copies when requested.	Year 2
		Review involvement opportunities and identify any gaps.	Year 2
		Tenant handbook to be reviewed to include updating methods of communication with Ark.	Year 2
		Review tenant participation section in handbook and update following review of menu of options.	
	Review current "Menu of Options".	The menu of options will provide varied involvement opportunities and support a blended approach to participation.	Year 1
	Maintain a register of tenants interested in tenant participation opportunities.	Spreadsheet developed. Monitor and increase by 10% per annum.	Year 1-5

Objective	What we will do	How we will do it	When will we do it
	Hold Community Pop Up events for tenants to promote tenant participation and encourage tenants to get involved. Undertake a review of Tenant Participation Governance/Best Practice Framework Build the capacity of tenants for meaningful participation and partnership working through our engagement opportunities. Develop methods of engagement and support with underrepresented groups. Ensure involvement methods are promoted and barriers removed. Produce a tenant's Yearly Newsletter based on tenant feedback and input.	Housing & Customer services officers to update register and reviewed annually.	Year 1-5
		Host yearly tenant conference to review tenant participation opportunities and encourage to register for the various options of engagement.	Year 2-5
		Inform participants about tenant participation at each activity and signpost to further opportunities and information.	Year 2-5
		Current forum to review governance structures and approve.	Year 2
		Consult with tenants' forum and action identified training needs for meaningful engagement.	Year 2
		Develop training suite to support tenants to develop confidence and skills they need to become tenant representatives through the various engagement opportunities.	Year 2
		Work with partner organisations to provide training and support.	Year 2
		Develop induction pack for tenants getting involved in relation to the Tenant Participation Governance and Best Practice Framework and roles/ responsibilities within the structure.	Year 2
		Community Investment Manager to attend quarterly meetings with residents residing at our temporary accommodation schemes to encourage engagement.	Year 2-5
		Identify the needs of the families experiencing homelessness.	Year 2-5
		Community Engagement Officer to develop and deliver programmes to meet the needs identified with annual activities specifically for homeless families to increase community inclusion and engagement.	Year 2-5
		Increase the number of younger tenants engaging by researching areas where we have higher numbers of young people living and identifying areas that they would engage in.	Year 3
		Include relevant information for tenants including performance statistics, tenancy updates, consultation outcomes and update on all activities.	Year 3 -5

STRATEGIC TARGET 2

To establish a standalone sub-department within the housing directorate, committed to the furtherance of tenant participation activities and the delivery of this strategy and its associated action plans:

We recognise that to provide meaningful engagement, the right level of resources must be committed. Over the course of the next five years, we will agree on the necessary resources and structures with a dedicated focus on tenant engagement and community development.

Objective	What we will do	How we will do it	When will we do it
Create a culture of tenant participation that is integrated across all departments within Ark Housing so that involving tenants becomes embedded within the organisation.	Develop and embed the 'blended' approach to Tenant Participation	Calendar of Housing Events collated centrally and disseminated to all staff.	Year 1 -5
	Develop a training programme on tenant participation for all staff.	Include tenant participation in staff induction.	Year 1
		Tenant Participation training to be included in the suite of essential training for all staff on a 3 yearly basis.	Year 2
		Review KPIs for all staff to include tenant participation.	Year 2
		Community Investment Manager to attend team meetings and give update on tenant participation and share good practice amongst teams.	Year 2-5
		Collect data from all teams quarterly on how they engaged with tenants.	Year 2
		Create step by step guide on how to set up tenant's groups for staff.	Year 3
		Involve the tenant's forum in creating the bid for annual tenant participation budget and involve them in how budget is spent.	Year 3
	Annual Budget for Tenant Participation		

STRATEGIC TARGET 3

To contribute to the organisation's Environmental & Decarbonisation Goals:

Through our Tenant Participation and Housing for All activity programmes we will continually champion energy conservation and innovation and the environment, and we will support communities in the development of forward-thinking green initiatives and spaces.

Objective	What we will do	How we will do it	When will we do it
Sustainable Communities	Actively working with tenants to reduce energy costs and energy consumption.	Provide tenants with appropriate energy efficiency advice, or direct them to sources of suitable advice, enabling them to reduce their energy costs and create healthy internal environments. Provide tenants with information about how they can play their part in addressing environmental issues; encourage tenants to maximise their use of local recycling facilities. Develop and deliver a communication plan to encourage staff and house-holders to reduce their environmental footprint.	Year 3 -5
More Green Space.	Create more nature-positive communities.	Promotion of wild gardens at our schemes to reintroduce wild species and create biodiverse habitats in consultation with tenants and in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Maintain our gardens, lawns and grounds in ways that promote bio-diversity and minimise environmental impact.	Year 3-5 Year 3-5
Secure low-cost energy	Local communities working together to secure low-cost energy.	Ark Housing has strong relationships with local communities and will collaborate with local community groups to partner in developing community energy projects. Encourage tenants to join the Housing Executive operated NI Oil Buying Club Network (NIOBC) which facilitates competitive rates of home heating oil through collective ordering whilst also encouraging budgeting and energy affordability	Year 3-5

STRATEGIC TARGET 4

To improve tenant satisfaction by improving service delivery:

Research has shown that by meaningfully engaging and involving tenants in shaping service delivery, landlords have seen significant benefits, including improved service delivery, improved communication, and greater levels of trust between staff and tenants. Over the next five years we will improve service delivery through the application of tenant led service reviews.

Objective	What we will do	How we will do it	When will we do it
Tenant involvement (including online involvement) impacts service delivery.	Develop our approach to reporting feedback on tenant views. Improve information on customer feedback, and how this has impacted service delivery.	Review current ways of consultation and identify gaps. Tenant suggestions to be collated centrally and reported on quarterly basis to Senior management team and tenants' forum. Report how feedback has been acted upon to our tenants. Directly feedback to participants on tenants' groups and forums.	Year 2 Year 2 -5 Year 2-5 Year 2-5
	Complete annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey	Appoint consultant to undertake Tenant Satisfaction Survey Findings published on social media channels and action plan for recommendations developed and implemented.	Year 2-5 Year 2-5
The Service continually adapts to meet changing needs.	Identify 2 x areas of service for scrutiny in conjunction with the Tenants Forum Complete annual mystery shopping exercise. Complete annual scheme walkabouts.	2 x service areas scrutinised, and report developed including recommendations. Recruit tenants, provide training and plan. Create a calendar of scheme walkabouts. Complete scheme walkabout and report outcomes to tenants.	Year 3-5 Year 3-5 Year 2 -5
	Be recognised in delivering best practice in tenant engagement	Achieve Gold standard accreditation.	Year 5



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