4th Edition (2024)

National Tenant Engagement Standards

Setting the standard for effective engagement

TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS

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Foreword

I am privileged in my role to see the energy and inspirational work of tenants and engagement specialists across the country. Their efforts drive our work to ensure that best practice on engagement and empowerment becomes common practice and that no tenant should ever feel overlooked or ignored.

Since 1988, Tpas has been on a mission to help landlords, contractors and tenants work together to deliver improved outcomes. We're still as passionate about tenant involvement now as when we were founded, but our work has evolved and grown to meet the growing list of challenges that the sector faces.

The past few years have seen a seismic shift in the regulatory environment around tenant engagement following the introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

We're extremely proud that some of the good practice that we have worked with our members to champion now forms part of the framework to which all social housing providers are required to adhere. The need for better transparency, openness and accountability between tenant and landlord is now rightly as essential to providers as sound finance and governance.

But no one in the sector should be content to just meet a bare minimum. As a sector, we should demand more of ourselves. Our work across the sector has shown us time and time again that where tenants are influential, empowered and involved, they receive better outcomes and landlords perform better.

Our newly updated National Engagement Standards, now in their fourth edition, go beyond the regulatory requirements and set out clear principles and actions that social landlords need to take to continuously improve the way residents are involved in shaping and improving services. Our recommendations are built on the back of decades of work with hundreds of landlords, and thousands of residents. They deliver against what tenants and communities expect.

I am extremely grateful to everyone, both within and beyond our membership, who has been involved in creating these updated standards. Together, as expert tenants and staff, we have worked to make them stretching but deliverable as well as progressive, inclusive and fair.

Effective tenant engagement and empowerment is critical to restoring the reputation of our sector and will be the foundation upon which our future success is built. As tenants, landlords and contractors, let's use this opportunity to deliver lasting change and a brighter future.

**Jenny Osbourne MBE**
Tpas Chief Executive

Why now

To say that the focus on tenant engagement has changed since we last published our engagement standards in 2021 would be an understatement.

Over the years, we have seen some fantastic examples of tenant engagement across the sector, delivering transformational outcomes for tenants and organisations alike. But we know that far too little focus has been put on the need to ensure that all tenants have the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their homes.

Fortunately, that is now changing at pace and some of the ideals that Tpas has been promoting for decades have now been embedded into law through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Consumer Regulation will see landlords held to account in new ways.

These new standards reflect the welcome changes that the new regulatory regime has introduced, as well as further strengthening elements around equality and diversity and the importance of learning from complaints.

Most importantly, our standards recognise that excellent tenant engagement is a journey, not an outcome. At Tpas we have always believed in continuous improvement. We will continue to champion the best practice and innovation of the vibrant and committed tenants and landlords that we work with.
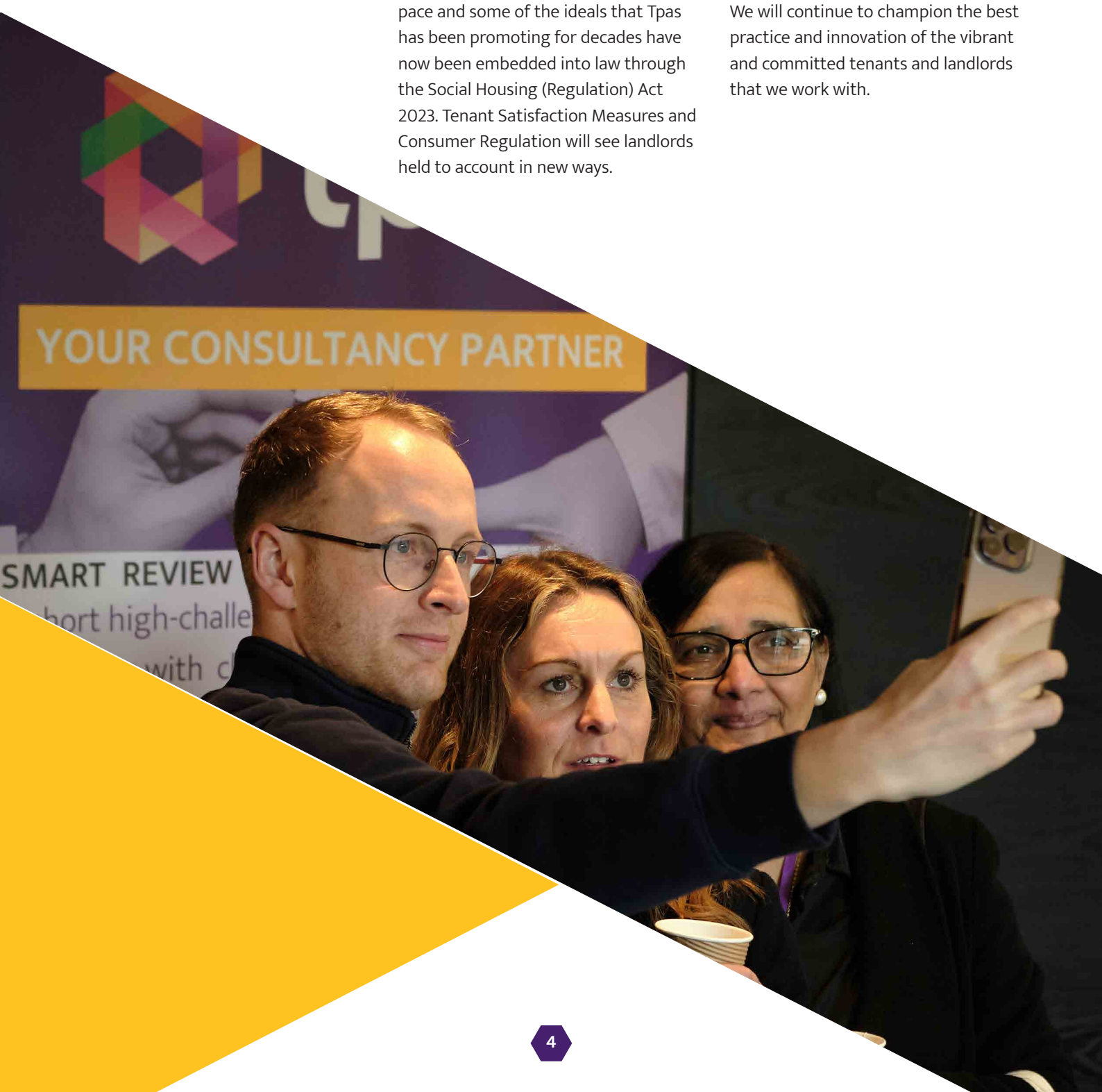
New Standards

These new Tpas National Engagement Standards reflect the renewed focus on, and the recognition of, the importance of the residents' voice.

We believe that words mean little, but that action is far more revealing of an organisation's attitude to engagement.

Our standards reflect the operating environment of social housing and have woven through them the increased expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing, Housing Ombudsman, the National Housing Federation's Code of Governance as well as the building safety regulator.

These standards reflect the aspirations and desires of our members for the future of engagement because they helped create them.

The standards dovetail into our new Tpas Engagement Accreditation which provides a robust and comprehensive test of an organisation's approach to effective engagement.

Culture

Although there are standards to meet, it's the behaviours and attitudes which run through an organisation that set the foundation for positive outcomes to take place.

Without the right culture, meeting standards on a consistent and continuous basis will be challenging. For Tpas, those attitudes and behaviours are essential.

We firmly believe that:

- A positive culture starts with the recognition of a mutually agreed role that shows the part residents can play in the governance of the organisation.

- True transparency and unhindered information sharing increases trust and builds relationships between residents and Landlords.

- Continuous listening & learning allows organisations to respond positively to their environment and the changing needs of its residents.

- Meeting the diverse needs of residents, removing barriers to engagement and providing information in plain language is non-negotiable.

- Providing a range of opportunities to engage, with appropriate support systems can produce more meaningful outcomes.

- The acknowledgment and support for community-led solutions are a vital part of building local confidence and wider engagement opportunities.

Following the introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has once again placed effective resident engagement in their regulatory sight.

Aside to the updated expectations in the Consumer Standards, the RSH has stated previously how poor engagement could indicate to them that an organisation has poor Governance, which is a clear indication of the importance that has been placed on engagement.

Sector definition

For ease of reading, the term residents is used from this point forward as a collective term to refer to tenants, leaseholders and, where appropriate, other relevant community stakeholders.

This document is intended to be read and understood by those new to engagement as well as those with more experience. Throughout we will make references to words and phrases that may not be in everyone's everyday language. It would be wrong to not use those words as there are not always suitable replacements, so we have provided a few explanations:

Organisation

Throughout the document we will use this term to generally refer to social housing landlords, although these standards will apply to other organisations such as contractors.

Governance

This is the decision-making body of your Landlord. In Housing Associations, Arms-Length Management Organisations (ALMO's) & Mutual Organisations it will be the Board. In a Local Authority it would be the Cabinet and/or Councillor with responsibility for Housing.

Scrutiny

This is a process for carrying out resident-led reviews of all areas of an organisation's business. It is stated in housing regulation and forms a large part of an organisational approach to welcoming in-depth examination.

Co-creation

This is the process of all stakeholders working in partnership to define a problem, find a solution and then implement that solution. For example: where a service or project is developed by residents and professionals working together as equal partners from the start, through to delivery and evaluation.

Risk

All organisations face risks. This could be to their rental income, ability to borrow money to build new homes as well as things such as fire safety, staffing and meeting the regulatory expectations. Each organisation will have their own particular set of risks.

Appropriate

This means it reflects the organisation in a way that is inclusive of the intended audience and their needs.

Agreed

We want to state that this term means agreed with involved residents or a Residents' Forum, Federation, or any other such method that works with your organisation to develop your engagement arrangements.

Our Framework

We have created a framework for these standards around seven key activities. Some are where engagement is vital to demonstrate a positive approach to co-regulation, and others are activities that just make really good sense.

1. Governance and Transparency

1.1 There is a clearly defined and agreed role for residents in the governance arrangements of the organisation.

1.2 There are clear, widely publicised routes for residents to hold the organisation to account on standards for service delivery, strategy, performance and decision making, including adherence to the Code of Conduct required by the Regulator's Competence and Conduct Standard.

1.3 There is an environment of mutual respect between the organisation and its residents with steps taken to identify and tackle negative stereotyping including understanding the impact of language and behaviours in relation to both tenure and the full range of protected characteristics.

1.4 The organisation regularly considers, and shares publicly how it uses the learning from resident engagement as well as its data and insight to improve the services it provides.

1.5 The organisation provides regular assurance to its residents how it keeps them safe in their homes and how it meets the regulatory and legal requirements.

1.6 The organisation engages with residents to produce an appropriate and meaningful Annual Report which should include resident satisfaction measures; performance against its stated commitments; how income is being spent, complaints trends, impact from resident engagement and comparisons of the organisational wage structure and management costs.

1.7 There is consistent and honest sharing of information with all stakeholders the risks the organisation faces, the person responsible for managing those risks, how it is meeting key organisational targets and how it plans to deal with areas of concern.

1.8 The organisation consults at least once every three years on the best way to involve residents in the governance and scrutiny of the housing management service.

1.9 The organisation publishes clear information on the roles and responsibilities of senior staff, including the named persons responsible for ensuring it meets both the economic and the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

2. Scrutiny

2.1 Scrutiny activity works to the five Tpas Scrutiny key principles; Independent, Inclusive, Positive, Constructive & Purpose.

2.2 An appropriate and agreed scrutiny model and process is in place, with clear routes into the governance, business and service delivery operations of the organisation.

2.3 The organisation, including its staff and governance functions, values scrutiny as a critical friend from an independent resident-led process.

2.4 Scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations, is designed to improve services, increase efficiency and provide robust assessment.

2.5 Scrutiny activity is provided with the financial and administrative support it needs to carry out its business.

2.6 Scrutiny is provided with all relevant performance, regulatory, legal & benchmarking information it needs to carry out its business.

2.7 Scrutiny has strong links with the other organisational engagement structures and the wider resident base in order to support its overall aims.

2.8 Scrutiny tests the fairness and equitable outcomes of landlord services, with particular regard to protected characteristics.

3. Business and Strategy

3.1 Residents are meaningfully engaged in the co-creation, monitoring and review of the organisation's engagement strategy to make sure it delivers clear impact and value.

3.2 Residents are meaningfully engaged in the development, monitoring and review of the organisation's policy; service; budget and strategic development as well as any local offers for service delivery.

3.3 Residents are fully informed of the organisation's policy on meeting the requirements of the Competence and Conduct Standard, and progress towards full compliance.

3.4 Residents and staff are clear of the purpose and intended outcomes of all engagement activities with clear explanations of the time needed and their level of influence.

3.5 The organisation has a clear and publicly stated plan for engaging residents in its health & safety responsibilities and makes clear those responsible for compliance.

3.6 There is an agreed timeframe to ensure that all engagement activities provide enough time to hear and consider resident views.

3.7 There is a clear and consistent method for reporting back to residents how their views have been considered in all engagement activities.

3.8 Residents are consulted in a timely and effective manner on any change in landlord or significant change in the management arrangements.

4. Complaints

4.1 There is a clear, accessible and continuously publicised complaints policy designed with residents, that shows the definition of a complaint, how to complain, key timescales, routes for redress, how to access help and support and who has responsibility for the complaints process.

4.2 The organisation ensures information on the Housing Ombudsman is readily available for all residents and provides assurance of its compliance with the complaints handling code.

4.3 Complaints are encouraged as opportunities to listen, learn and influence change with a culture that assures that speaking out will not bring negative consequences.

4.4 Residents are engaged in the continuous learning and development from complaints, with all improvements widely publicised to residents and staff.

4.5 Complaints, including those determined by the Housing Ombudsman, are documented, widely communicated and consistently publicised to all stakeholders.

4.6 Residents are engaged in routinely reviewing the complaints handling policy & process to include self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

5. Information & Communication

5.1 The organisation understands who its residents are, including their diverse needs, and uses appropriate methods to overcome any barriers to communication or engagement, including where these are linked to protected characteristics, or where tenants have nominated representatives or advocates to engage on their behalf.

5.2 Relevant information is provided to all recognised panels and involved residents in an agreed timeframe to allow them to monitor performance, and hold their landlord to account on how key organisational objectives are being met. This includes information required to scrutinise whether outcomes are fair for diverse groups of tenants and those with protected characteristics.

5.3 All information provided to residents is clear and understandable with key points summarised, using an inclusive range of methods and in a format to suit the intended recipient.

5.4 In any ad-hoc or specifically focussed engagement activity, information is provided in an agreed timeframe before any activity takes place.

5.5 The organisation publishes useful information on areas such as governance, regulatory judgements & inspections, compliance, how to get involved, management, repairs, complaints, performance, including the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, and the impact made from its resident engagement activities, along with any other requirements set by the Regulator of Social Housing. Information is made available on the website and through other channels that meet residents' diverse needs.

5.6 The organisation provides an accessible and unhindered route for residents to request information relating to the activities of their landlord. This should be widely publicised to reflect its resident profile.

5.7 The organisation regularly distributes to its residents up to date information including all performance information required by the Regulator of Social Housing, performance against set targets and emerging organisational challenges as well as topics of community and national interest. The frequency, content and methods of distribution will be agreed by the organisation and its residents and will reflect residents' diverse needs.

6. Resources for Engagement

6.1 The organisation provides sufficient resources to deliver effective engagement and residents have the opportunity to influence the decision about the resources made available.

6.2 There is an appropriate system in place for recognition and reimbursement of the time given by residents for engagement activities.

6.3 Involved residents are offered timely advice, relevant training and where appropriate, effective mentoring and their diverse needs are met.

6.4 The organisation and its involved residents independently network to gather best practice in resident engagement and increase their awareness of the wider housing sector challenges.

6.5 All staff can describe the benefits resident engagement can bring to the organisation, its residents and the wider community and understand how their role can enhance the organisation's ability to hear the residents' voice.

7. Community and Wider Engagement

7.1 There is an appropriate menu of engagement opportunities that; reflects the resident profile; responds to the different needs in relation to equality strands and any additional support, which can be evidenced in the delivery of their services, engagement activities and communications to promote widespread engagement.

7.2 The organisation provides opportunities for its residents to engage in emerging social housing sector policy consultations and responses.

7.3 Where regeneration or planned improvements take place, residents will be fully informed and from the start are part of the project planning, delivery and monitoring.

7.4 There is a clear approach to promoting and supporting community action in the communities the organisation has residents which includes any Right to Manage opportunities.

7.5 Community Investment activities support partnership working and provide opportunities to increase understanding of resident and community priorities.

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Culture

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