

Four Million Homes

Knowledge and action
for change in social housing

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Information and accountability – a residents' guide



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This document may also be viewed as a web page at www.fourmillionhomes.org/guidance/information-and-accountability-a-residents-guide/

Introduction

In 2023 Parliament passed new legislation that applies to all Registered Providers in England that reshapes how social housing is regulated, shifting the focus of the Regulator of Social Housing and enhancing the role of the Housing Ombudsman.

From 1st April 2024 the new Regulatory Framework came into force, changing the way that housing services (called the Consumer Standards) are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. Alongside this broadened approach to regulation, the Housing Ombudsman has published its updated Complaints Handling Code. These changes are designed to improve resident services, make it easier to hold landlords to account, to streamline complaints processes and enhance the powers that external bodies have to take action against landlords that routinely underperform.

This guidance does not seek to repeat what is contained within the new Consumer Standards or Complaints Handling Code; these are available at [Regulatory standards for landlords – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) and [The Complaint Handling Code | Housing Ombudsman Service \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk).

This guidance seeks to provide residents with information about how their landlord should be accountable to them and how they can hold their landlord to account where it is failing to meet expected standards.

About Four Million Homes

Four Million Homes is a catalyst for change in social housing, by providing free knowledge, guidance and training on resident rights and how to stand up for them. Find answers to your questions, bite-sized help videos, or sign up for free online and in-person training at www.fourmillionhomes.org. Four Million Homes is funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and runs for two years until March 2025.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard 2024

The Regulator of Social Housing has updated its Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard which is now called the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

The Regulator of Social Housing will actively assess landlords' compliance (for those landlords with more than 1,000 homes) with this Standard by monitoring their Tenant Satisfaction Measures data, undertaking inspection visits and meeting residents involved in scrutiny panels; for landlords with less than 1,000 homes a lighter touch approach will be taken that will be risk-based.



Outlined below are the headline required outcomes and specific expectations that Registered Providers of social housing must meet.

Required outcomes – landlords must:

- treat residents and prospective residents with fairness and respect;
- take action to deliver fair and equitable service outcomes;
- take residents' views into account when making decisions about how services are delivered and tell residents how they have done this;
- communicate with residents and provide them with information so they can access services, understand what to expect from their landlord and hold their landlord to account;
- collect and provide information to enable residents to scrutinise service delivery and performance;
- ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly, effectively and promptly.

Specific expectations – landlords must:

Diverse needs:

- understand the diverse needs of residents;
- assess whether their services deliver fair and equitable outcomes;
- communicate in an appropriate manner with residents;
- ensure their services are accessible and allow residents to be supported by representatives or advocates.

Engagement with residents:

- give residents meaningful opportunities to influence and scrutinise strategies, policies and services;
- assist and support residents in implementing resident-led approaches to influencing and scrutinising;
- support residents in exercising their Right to Manage, Right to Transfer or otherwise approaches to delivering housing services;

- regularly consider with residents how to tailor and improve their approach to service delivery;
- consult with residents before a change in landlord or management arrangements.

Information about landlord services:

- provide residents with accessible information about landlord services, how to access them, the standards that they should expect, how safe and the quality they should expect their homes and communal areas to be, the rent and service charges they pay and the responsibilities their landlord has to maintain homes, communal areas and their neighbourhood;
- provide residents with accessible information about the requirement to provide them with a home that meets the government's Decent Homes Standard, their landlord's health and safety legal duties, their tenancy rights and the rights of disabled residents to reasonable adjustments;
- communicate with residents about next steps and outcomes when delivering services;
- operate fair, reasonable, accessible and transparent housing and neighbourhood policies, setting out how decisions are made and what the processes for residents appealing decisions are;
- provide residents with information about the roles and responsibilities of senior employees and officers, including details of who has responsibility for compliance with the Consumer Standards.

Performance information:

- collect and make available the Tenant Satisfaction Measures;
- ensure that performance data is accurate, reliable, valid and transparent;
- provide residents with accessible information about how they are performing, what actions they will take to improve performance, how they have taken resident views into account, how income is being spent, what their directors are being paid and what their management costs are.

Complaints:

- ensure that complaints procedures are simple, accessible and publicised;
- provide residents with accessible information about how to make a complaint, what the landlord complaints handling process is, what residents can do if they are not satisfied with their landlord's response or process for handling their complaints and the types of complaints they receive, what lessons they have learnt and how they will use these lessons to improve services.

Self-referral:

- communicate in a timely manner with the Regulator of Social Housing all material issues of non-compliance or potential non-compliance with the Consumer Standards.

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Regulator of Social Housing published the Tenant Satisfaction Measures in September 2022 and reporting on them is a regulatory requirement as part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. Registered Providers must undertake Tenant Perception Surveys and collate internal data which must be submitted to the Regulator of Social Housing every year.

For small providers (those with less than 1,000 homes) there is no requirement to submit data to the Regulator of Social Housing, but it must be published to residents; the Tenant Perception Survey should be run every 2 years.



There are 22 measures as outlined below that should either be assessed through a Tenant Perception Survey or drawn from core landlord data.

Overall satisfaction

TP01 Overall satisfaction – Tenant Perception Survey

Keeping properties in good repair

TP02 Satisfaction with repairs – Tenant Perception Survey

TP03 Satisfaction with time taken to complete most recent repair – Tenant Perception Survey

RP01 Homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard – Landlord Data

RP02 Repairs completed within target timescale – Landlord Data

Maintaining building safety

TP04 Satisfaction that the home is well maintained – Tenant Perception Survey

TP05 Satisfaction that the home is safe to live in – Tenant Perception Survey

BS01 Gas safety checks – Landlord Data

BS02 Fire safety checks – Landlord Data

BS03 Asbestos safety checks – Landlord Data

BS04 Water safety checks – Landlord Data

BS05 Lift safety checks – Landlord Data

Respectful and helpful engagement

TP06 Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them – Tenant Perception Survey

TP07 Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them – Tenant Perception Survey

TP08 Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect – Tenant Perception Survey

Responsible neighbourhood management

- TP10 Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean, safe and well-maintained – Tenant Perception Survey
- TP11 Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods – Tenant Perception Survey
- TP12 Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling of anti-social behaviour – Tenant Perception Survey
- NM01 Anti-social behaviour cases relative to the size of the landlord – Landlord Data

Effective handling of complaints

- TP9 Satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling of complaints – Tenant Perception Survey
- CH01 Complaints relative to the size of the landlord – Landlord Data
- CH02 Complaints responded to within Complaint Handling Code timescales – Landlord Data

Resident panels

There is no one definition of resident panels; across the social housing sector they are involved in decision-making, monitoring and scrutiny, service review, policy consideration and various other functions.

To reflect these diverse views, we have used the term 'resident panel' to encompass a non-prescriptive set of arrangements being used to ensure accountability to residents.

The term 'resident panel' could also be used to refer to the many neighbourhood-based groups set up by residents and communities, such as residents associations.



Resident panels should be seen in the context of many initiatives from the 1980s onwards designed to empower residents. These initiatives have included:

- the introduction of the Right to be Consulted in 1985;
- housing co-operatives, Estate Management Boards, the Right to Manage 1994 and Tenant Management Organisations;
- Compulsory Competitive Tendering monitoring panels;
- Tenant Compacts;
- Together with Tenants (the NHF charter)
- resident groups of varying shapes and sizes (including numerous tenants and resident associations and tenant federations);
- residents on the boards of Registered Providers;
- resident involvement in stock transfer housing associations;
- resident owned housing associations;
- co-regulation and the Regulator of Social Housing's focus on resident involvement and empowerment.

All these approaches have played a role in providing greater opportunities for residents to be involved in housing issues.

Why are resident panels important?

Over many years, resident panels have been progressively becoming an integral part of how landlords engage with their residents and shape their business. Where resident panels are set up well, they are a business asset to the landlord. They can:

- make considerable contributions to ensuring that services are what residents want;
- play a role in supporting effective governance and decision-making, particularly in areas such as getting value for money;
- be an important component in assessing performance;
- provide constructive challenge to the accepted ways that things are done to improve them;

- be particularly helpful in sorting out resident problems and issues locally and speedily;
- act as service user ambassadors for the landlord.

Improving quality of life

Residents get involved with resident panels for many reasons, and there are many ways that resident panels can help to improve quality of life:

- providing a means for residents to get involved in shaping how housing services are provided;
- providing a means for residents to influence how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed;
- enabling residents to challenge, assess the performance of and review services;
- offering a constructive forum for residents to engage with their neighbours to resolve problems and discuss ideas about how services can be improved;
- enabling residents to gain skills, knowledge, experience, and confidence – both individually and as a team.

The concept of co-regulation where the Regulator, the landlord, and residents would all have a role to play to ensure that landlords complied with the Regulatory Standards was introduced as part of the regulatory framework in 2010 and continues with the new approach to Consumer Regulation introduced in April 2024.

Common principles behind resident panels

Co-regulation

Co-regulation is about residents and landlords working in partnership to self-regulate service delivery. As well as enabling residents to ensure that landlords are delivering what is expected of them in the Regulatory Standards, co-regulation can mean that residents and landlords work with each other to shape landlord decision-making and services.

Resident leadership

Resident panels can only be as effective as the residents who get involved with them. Different residents will perform different functions within resident panel arrangements, but all those who get involved are the resident leadership. They need to have or develop skills and attitudes that enable them to be effective resident leaders. Resident panels need to be based on:

- development of the understanding of the resident leadership – those involved in resident panels need to understand their role, purpose and responsibilities, recognising their accountability to the other residents;
- supporting resident panels to think independently, reach their own conclusions, challenge when it is appropriate to do so, and hold the landlord to account;
- identification of the skills and qualities that resident panel members need to have or develop in order to be effective resident leaders; procedures that will help them develop the skills they need and assessment of their progress;
- enthusiasm to learn and to engage with residents and landlords from elsewhere to gain wider knowledge.

Access to all and fairness

Resident panels should be equal, diverse and inclusive. They should be accessible to all residents and operate in accordance with accepted standards of fairness and conduct. Common principles include that resident panels should:

- seek to understand and reflect the views of all the diverse groups of residents (and other service users) – it has often been the case that the traditional structure and form approaches to resident participation have favoured types of residents and created barriers to involvement for others;
- be accessible to all residents – all residents need to be able to raise issues through their resident panel;
- be open to all residents to apply to become a member of the resident panel;
- be governed by codes of conduct agreed with residents that are complied with and steps taken if breached.

Effective processes and adequate support

Resident panels can only be effective if they are supported by clear and effective processes and if they are adequately resourced to carry out their functions:

- having clearly defined and agreed processes that support the functions of the resident panels and that transmit learning and good practice throughout the Registered Provider;
- having clarity about the objectives of the work of the resident panel;
- periodically assessing the impact of the work of the resident panel and ensuring that they are delivering the intended outcomes;
- ensuring that sufficient resources are available to support the resident panel's work.

Achieving outcomes for residents

Ultimately resident panels must be about achieving outcomes for residents.

Inputs The resources that go to make something happen (e.g. volunteer and staff time, financial costs).

Outputs The things that are done to achieve outcomes (e.g. meetings, focus groups, surveys, scrutiny exercises, a new policy, contract or leaflet).

Outcomes The changes you want to achieve that make things better for residents or prospective residents. Outcomes can be achieved in the short, medium and long term, and they can be qualitative and quantitative:

Qualitative examples:

- residents receive better quality information;
- disabled people find the service easier to access;
- anti-social behaviour cases are resolved more effectively;
- residents feel more confident to review policies.

Quantitative examples:

- number of first-time repairs increased;
- more residents feel their views are considered;

- average time to let a home decreased;
- cost per repair decreased and so more resources available.

Options for resident panels

Decision-making

Effective resident panels involved in decision-making usually need to:

- be about partnership working with the landlord;
- have a means of being accountable back to the wider resident constituency;
- have routes by which they can influence decision-making and services;
- be about practical issues that matter to residents.

The wide array of resident panels involved in decision-making makes them difficult to define. The brief descriptions below give some impression of the diversity that exists.

Co-governance

Some resident panels involved in decision-making have been defined to have a specific involvement in governance (in some cases in the landlord's rules). They could be described as 'co-governance' panels, working alongside housing association or ALMO boards or the Council's cabinet.

Joint management

Others involve residents as part of a body that also includes other members, such as senior staff, Portfolio Holders for housing or other councillors.

Resident management and control

Resident controlled housing organisations (e.g. co-operatives and tenant management organisations) are examples of resident panels who manage and/or own their homes.

Advisory panels

Whilst not formally part of the governance structure, some panels have been set up to perform similar functions with direct relationships with boards and senior staff.

Resident federations

Resident federations are a long-standing means by which residents have been represented. Usually independent of the landlord, they have had various relationships with landlords and operate in different ways.

Area and specific panels

Larger landlords often have area based resident panels that operate locally. Some housing associations formed as a result of mergers have resident panels set up in different parts of group structures. Some resident panels have been set up to consider service areas, such as communications, major repairs, resident involvement, diversity, and many others. Some resident panels have been set up to represent particular demographic groups in relation to landlord's residents.

Shaping services

Most landlords have panels that have been set up to enable residents to be involved in reviewing particular services. These may be permanent or temporary task and finish groups. Effective systems to review services might include:

- a systematic plan to review frontline services so that residents are clear when elements of the service will be reviewed;
- leadership of the review by a team including residents, staff and possibly governing body members;
- gathering evidence that feeds into the review (such as survey data, evidence of dissatisfaction, focus groups, the use of resident sounding boards, resident inspection and mystery shopping reports, performance data, benchmark information and information on best practice used elsewhere);
- collating this evidence in a resident friendly fashion to enable residents to challenge emerging conclusions and to enable informed debate between members of the review team;
- changes to policies, procedures and systems that are then fed back to residents to show how their input made a difference.

Monitoring and scrutiny

This function is carried out in many ways in landlords. Governing bodies (boards of housing associations and ALMOs and Cabinets in local councils) scrutinise the way their staff implement policies. Sub-committees scrutinise aspects of services. Various groups scrutinise performance information. External and internal auditors independently scrutinise particular activities (most notably the landlord's accounts). Resident panels can be involved in many of these activities.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires that landlords make information available to residents that enables them to scrutinise performance and hold landlords to account, and the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures require landlords to publish data regarding 22 indicators. The publication of this data and information is a particular activity that enables resident panels to be involved in effective scrutiny and monitoring.

Effective resident scrutiny is driven by:

- independence from landlord governance;
- accountability, openness and transparency;
- alignment with the strategic and performance management frameworks of a landlord;
- clear responsibilities that are agreed from the beginning;
- a capacity to deliver against expectations;
- decisions must be made freely and based on access to a range of information from different commissioned sources;
- an ability to shape the parameters of the information the landlord collects;
- embedding resident scrutiny into formal performance, operation and assessment frameworks;
- raising the profile of scrutiny and making as many residents aware as possible of what it is and how to get involved;
- an effective approach to deciding what areas are scrutinised and what evidence will inform decisions;
- establishing an appropriate recruitment process, and systems for managing conflicts of interest;
- agreeing scrutiny report formats and processes for conveying recommendations to the governing body.

Collaborative resident panels

The previous examples were all about resident panels formed within one particular landlord. A further option that some residents and landlords have explored is whether residents would benefit from resident representatives coming together from different landlords in a borough or an area.

Collaborative resident panels could enable residents to:

- compare, contrast and benchmark services, policies and systems in different landlords;
- develop peer pressure in an area to ensure that all landlords improve their performance to the level of the best performer;
- develop a greater sense of local identity and resident confidence, community pride, self-help and independence;
- enable residents to have a stronger local voice with their local councils and other local service providers.

Some key issues to be considered when setting up a collaborative resident panel are:

- who initiates the process?
- how will the panel be resourced and facilitated?
- what area will the panel cover?
- where will the resident representatives come from and how will they be recruited?
- what outcomes will the panel seek to achieve?

Activities that collaborative resident panels could explore include:

Service-related issues

- comparisons of service review processes and standards;
- consideration of allocations and anti-social behaviour systems;
- consideration of repairs and improvements systems;

- consideration of grounds maintenance and estate services;
- joint mystery shopping and resident inspection;
- common resident satisfaction benchmarking;
- common service standards;
- using panels to bring operational staff together;
- local service rationalisation in multi-landlord areas;
- considering joint under-occupancy strategies;
- considering joint procurement;
- resident complaints handling processes.

Resident involvement

- shared resident training;
- comparing and developing resident involvement structures;
- involved resident events and newsletters.

Other issues

- considering local housing and regeneration strategies;
- considering national housing and other policies;
- inputting into choice based lettings debates;
- considering digital inclusion, fuel poverty, worklessness, domestic violence and potentially other areas.

Resources

Key resources for establishing and managing resident panels are:

- governance documentation for the panel;
- information about how to access landlord governance structures and service reviews;
- provision of key information, annual reports and Tenant Satisfaction Measures data;

- financial data and information about value for money performance;
- key strategic documents;
- recruitment and induction procedures;
- procedures for enabling a diverse and inclusive membership;
- procedures for building resident confidence and awareness;
- procedures for managing resident remuneration;
- procedures for impact assessment and review of panel effectiveness;
- procedures for managing conflict and overcoming challenges.

Glossary of terms

Arms-length Management Organisation (ALMO)

An organisation set up by a Council to manage its housing.

Cabinet

The members of the controlling political group within a Council who have legal responsibility for overall decision-making.

Choice based lettings

A system to enable prospective residents to choose social housing homes.

Collaborative resident panel

A resident panel made up of resident representatives from different landlords.

Co-governance

Landlord arrangements where Resident panels are constitutionally part of the governance of the landlord.

Co-regulation

Residents and landlords working together to ensure and monitor standards.

Focus group

A group of people (often a particular group such as young people) brought together to consider a particular issue on a one-off basis.

Frontline services

Housing and other services that have direct contact with residents.

Governing body

The part of an organisation that has the legal responsibility to make decisions (i.e. a board of a housing association, housing co-operative or ALMO and the Cabinet in a council).

Mystery shopping

A method of checking services where unknown residents and/or others assess services.

Registered Provider

A landlord registered as a social housing provider with the Regulator of Social Housing.

Regulatory standard

A standard set by the Regulator of Social Housing with which Registered Providers are required to comply.

Resident scrutiny

Residents involved in close and critical observation or examination of landlord services and operation.

Right to Manage

A legal right for council residents where they can take over management of their homes.

Scrutiny

Close and critical observation or examination.

Service review group

A body set up in landlords to review a particular service usually involving residents.

Sounding board

A body set up in landlords which is consulted on particular issues (usually by post or email).

Task and Finish group

A temporary group set up to review a particular service or activity.

Tenant federation

A (usually independent) tenant representative body in a particular area.

Tenant Management Organisation

A resident owned organisation that has legal responsibility to manage local authority or housing association homes and estates.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

A range of performance indicators set out by the Regulator of Social Housing that landlords must collect and publish data about; this data is collected from an annual Tenant Perception Survey and internal landlord data.

Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard

The Regulatory Standard that applies to how landlords treat residents, provide information to them, involve and empower them in decision-making and scrutinising performance, enable them to hold their landlord to account and to make complaints where they are not satisfied with the service they are receiving.

Under occupancy

An issue where a home has more bedrooms than the occupants are considered to need.

Value for money

Ensuring that resources are used effectively and efficiently.

