

Your Home - Your Say

Tenant Engagement Strategy 2023 – 2028

Swindon Borough Council Housing



Contents

Introduction	4
About us	4
Why do we need a strategy?	5
The purpose of the strategy.....	5
How this strategy was developed.	6
This is what you told us.....	6
Existing opportunities to engage with Housing	7
What’s new	8
Reviewing and monitoring.....	8
Appendix 1 Tenant demographics as at September 2023	10
Appendix 2 - Tenant Workshop feedback summary.....	13
Appendix 3 - A selection of comments from tenants at the workshops:	14
What do you like about where you live	15

Introduction

This Tenant Engagement Strategy provides a framework for how engagement opportunities for Swindon Borough Council (SBC) tenants will develop over the next five years. It will ensure that tenant engagement is in line with the Mission of the Council's Cabinet to:

- Combat inequality – make Swindon a fairer place, reduce disadvantage and eliminate big disparities in life expectancy, education levels and social justice.
- Build a better Swindon – create a town ready for the challenges of the coming decades.
- Achieve net zero – fully play our part as a Council and a town in combatting climate change. Work with communities to find new ways of doing things that help, not hinder, the natural environment.

We are committed to realising effective engagement through working with tenants and residents, to gain a better understanding of how the Housing Service could be improved. We will draw on tenants' advice, knowledge and experience to achieve shared objectives, and create resilient neighbourhoods.

Using the guidance set down in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and the Housing Regulator Consumer Standards we will work with tenants and residents to support tenant engagement at SBC and to encourage volunteering in our communities. In line with the Building Safety Act 2022 we are producing a separate Resident Engagement Strategy, this is specifically designed around residents living in high-rise buildings¹.

About us

Swindon Borough Council (SBC) has, at the time of writing, 10,300 social housing properties, these include 32 sheltered housing schemes, five supported housing schemes, eight high rise blocks, gypsy and traveller sites and general-purpose homes. Our social housing generally is situated borough wide in a variety of locations both urban and rural.

We collect core data about our tenants when they first access housing, this is in line with statutory guidance and relates to the nine protected characteristics (we do not capture information on all nine at present). We currently record, age, gender, disability and ethnicity². Other information is captured on an ad hoc basis with regards to specific tenant needs. Our aspiration is to know more about who our existing and new tenants are, this will be supported by the tenancy audit being carried out by Tenancy Services. We will review the data we collect to enable us to better understand our tenants.

¹ Over 18 metres in height or having more than seven storeys www.gov.uk/guidance/criteria-for-being-a-higher-risk-building-during-the-occupation-phase-of-the-new-higher-risk-regime

² Appendix 1

Why do we need a strategy?

A strategy allows us to evaluate where we are now, and by using the evidence gathered from our tenants, shows us the direction we need to take and how we get there. It will allow us to monitor our progress for specific aims throughout the period. The strategy will set out the current difficulties we face and consider how best we use available resources to overcome these to achieve our goals.

The purpose of the strategy

This sets out our approach to tenant engagement, it has been developed in collaboration with our tenants. It will provide a framework on which to shape tenant engagement opportunities, improving on our current activities and widening the range of opportunities that allow tenants to communicate with us. It gives tenants access to the highest decision-making levels in the Housing Service, ensuring that their voices are heard when we design and deliver services.

Tenant engagement benefits all stakeholders through:

- Improved service delivery
- Increased efficiency
- Increased tenant satisfaction
- Improved transparency and accountability
- Improved communication
- Ensuring the landlord is following regulatory guidance

The strategy will set out in plain terms what tenants can expect through involvement with SBC Housing. We will link our Tenant Engagement Action Plan to current legislation; the Social Housing (regulation) Act 2023 and the Housing Regulator Consumer Standards.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act will hold poor landlords to account where their service is lacking and ensures that social housing landlords focus on the housing needs of their tenants. It sets out a clear intention that organisations should seek continuous improvement in enabling tenants to hold their landlord to account. It includes reforms set out in the Social Housing White paper, these include:

- Ensuring the tenant is safe in their home
- Providing data to tenants so they know how their landlord is performing
- Dealing with your complaints promptly and fairly
- Ensuring that we treat tenants with respect
- Giving space for your voice to be heard
- Providing a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in

We aim to increase the number of tenants who get involved in their Housing service, whether through volunteering with one of our established tenant groups or by giving us their direct feedback on the service we deliver.

We also aim to promote opportunities for tenants to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence through volunteering activities within Housing. We will work in partnership with the Tenant Academy to deliver this.

How this strategy was developed

We communicated with tenants using a variety of methods to find out their thoughts about the current service received from SBC Housing and what aspects they would like to see improved, introduced or removed.

Initially we held a workshop to which we invited tenants, officers and the Cabinet Member for Housing to talk about the themes of accountability, “having your say” about the service they received and what community meant to them. ³ In total we spoke to 100 tenants with regards to their expectations about how we engage with them. We met with tenants at the three community cafés, at a ‘Tenants Association Sheltered Housing’ (TASH) meeting, through our tenant newsletter and posed questions to tenants on the Housing Facebook page.

The actions that come from the strategy will be agreed with our tenants.

This is what you told us

There were similar themes arising from all conversation that we had with tenants. The main topics raised were:

Improved communication

You told us that you expect us to improve our communications with tenants. You want us to respond to your queries promptly by letter, text and email and that you would like more Housing staff to come into the community, using the cafes if appropriate, for face to face discussions. You told us that you would like more direct contact with your neighbourhood housing teams.

When it comes to how we communicate you have asked for plain English and told us how important it is that we listen to all matters that you raise with us. You expect us to ring back if we say we will and you think we should have more staff to answer the phone when you ring in.

Getting it right first time

You don’t want repeated visits especially for repairs, they are frustrating and time consuming. You expect the correct tradesperson for the job you have reported.

Sheltered Housing tenants asked to be informed when planned maintenance is happening.

If we cancel an appointment you expect to be notified wherever possible in good time.

³ Appendix 2

You also told us we should be stricter with those tenants with untidy gardens and that we should ensure when moving a new tenant into a property it is the 'right place for the right person'.

Feedback and information sharing

You told us that there is a lack of information on reported communal repairs, tenants are not updated on what will happen or when.

You would like to see us give you more information about the help, support and services available from Housing such as how the garden assistance scheme works. It would be useful to you to have a printed version of some information.

You would like us to clarify who has responsibility for areas, as there seems to be some confusion between SBC and the Parishes.

You would like regular community meetings. You would like regular updates and communications on the housing matters that affect you as a tenant.

You would like to see more detail on how we spend the budget.

You would like more direct contact with your Housing teams either face to face or by phone.

Respect

You told us that we need to understand the people who live on our estates and treat all tenants with respect.

You commented that you feel that tenants don't get listened to, no matter what the reason.

You would like the Neighbourhood Housing Officers to attend the Community Cafes so that you could get to know each other better. You also feel it would be useful if other relevant Housing staff came along too.

Sheltered housing tenants said they would like to see more housing staff visit their schemes.

Existing opportunities to engage with Housing

We currently have established groups and activities that tenants can get involved with to make a difference to the service they receive or to the community in which they live. We offer both formal and informal opportunities through the Street Reps, Tenant Scrutiny Panel, Tenants Association Sheltered Housing (TASH) and various focus groups. To find out more about any of these please contact us at getinvolved@swindon.gov.uk , we will be delighted to talk to you.

We attend Community Cafés where we talk to tenants about particular housing issues they may be experiencing, provide information about available support, and help with repair reporting and problems.

We have a housing Facebook page and a tenant newsletter, both of which provide information and invite comment.

To help overcome barriers to engagement and encourage wider participation we are able to offer specific and generic training, covering expenses, provision for travel and childcare. We can provide IT equipment for tenants to use on specific projects.

What's new

We will continue with the activities above and hope to expand on the numbers of tenants getting involved. We will continue to support tenants looking to join a local group or provide feedback.

Throughout February 2024 tenants will be offered the opportunity to comment further on the type of engagement activities they would like to see. We will do this through electronic survey, hard copy survey and conversations to ensure that as many tenants as want to can help shape future engagement.

We will expand our attendance at community venues.

We will continue to support the Tenant Scrutiny Panel with their service reviews, including help to arrange focus groups when required.

We will improve the information we provide to tenants through our Tenant Focus newsletter and Facebook page. We will dedicate two of our newsletters to the Property teams and one will report back on our performance data for the year. We will encourage tenants to challenge our performance where it falls below expected targets.

As part of the new Housing Regulator regime we will produce an annual perception survey (Tenant Satisfaction Measure) that will be sent to a random sample of tenants. We will report back to staff and tenants the feedback from this survey and what actions we have taken as a result of your responses.

We will continue to ask for volunteers for existing groups and provide training and support as needed.

We will ensure that tenants have the opportunity for two-way communication with senior managers in Housing and to the Cabinet Member for Housing.

We are always open to new ideas and innovation and happy to discuss tenants' suggestions for new participation activities.

Reviewing and monitoring

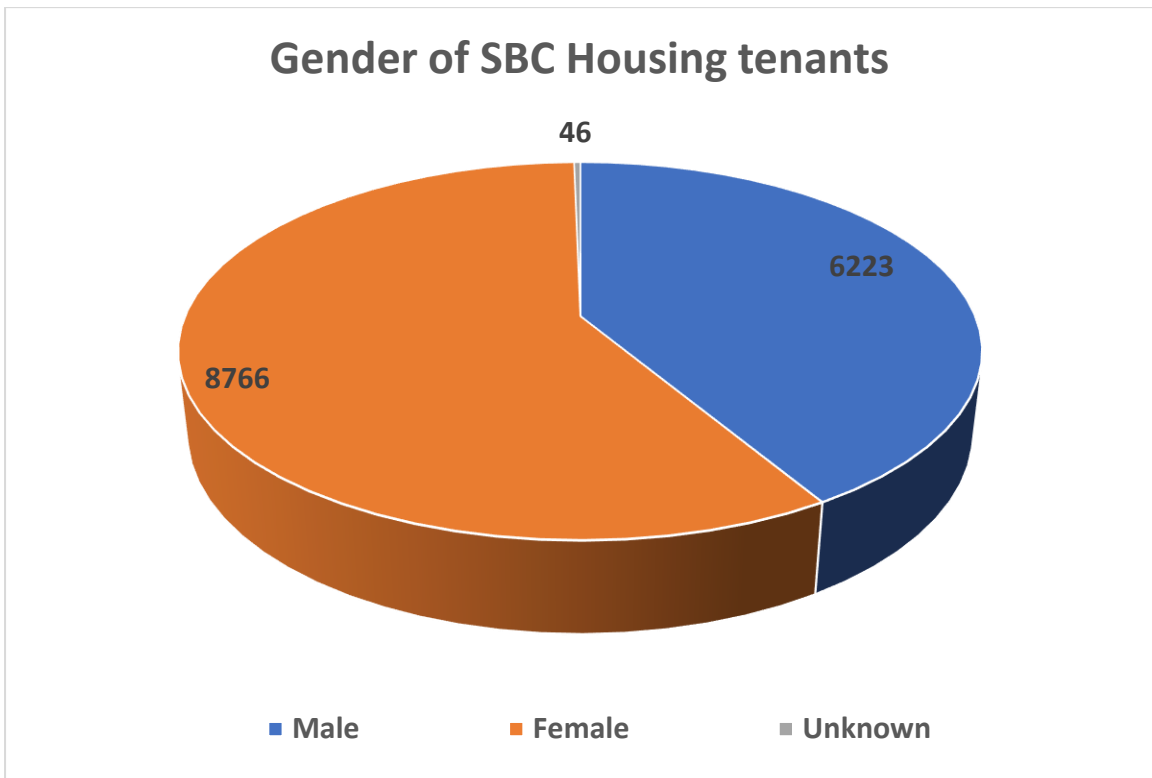
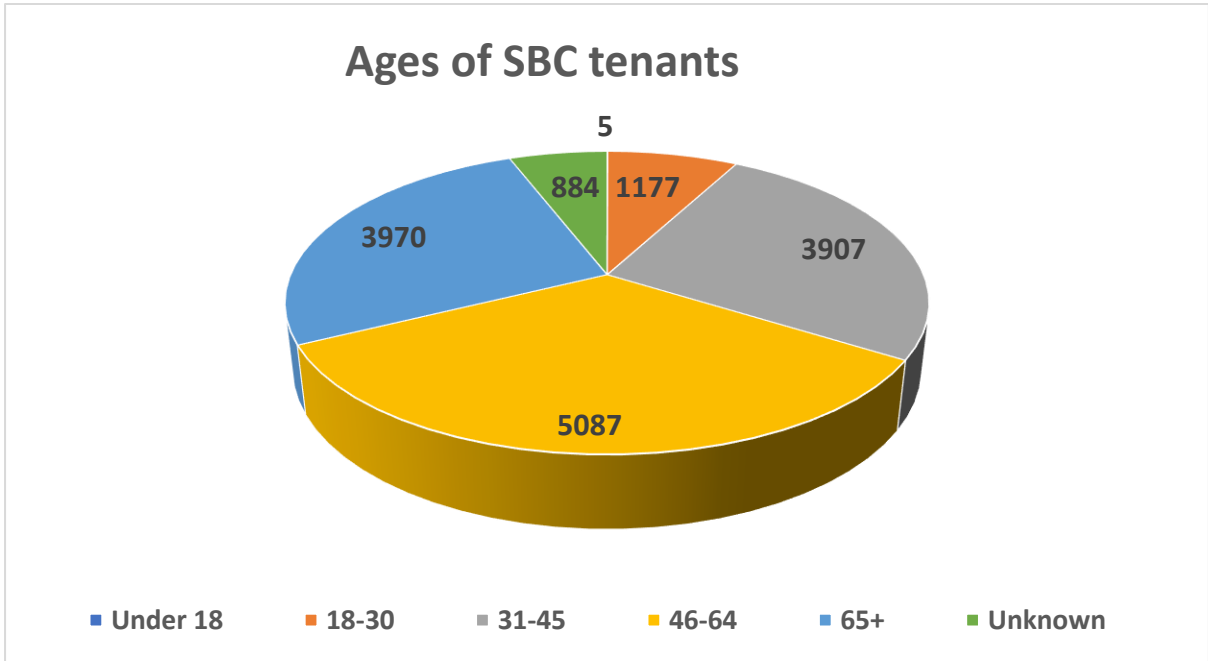
We will agree the objectives in the action plan with tenants, inviting feedback from those who originally worked with us on the strategy. We will also publish the document for other tenants to comment on.

We will publish our performance around the action plan on a quarterly basis. This will be in the Tenant Focus Newsletter and hard copies will be available on request.

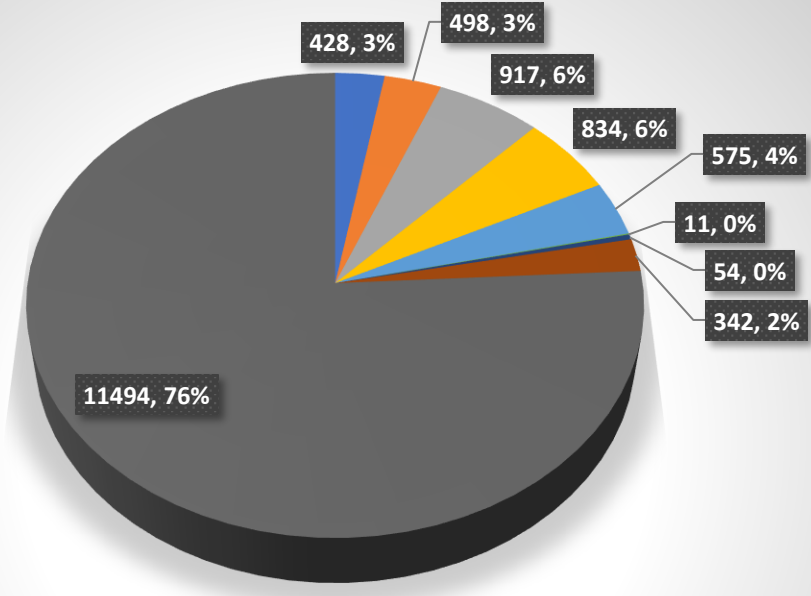
Working with tenants we will review the strategy in response to future changes in regulation and guidance. We will let tenants know when this occurs.

We will also review the strategy in line with feedback received from our annual Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys and from future inspections of Housing Service delivery by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Appendix 1 Tenant demographics as at September 2023

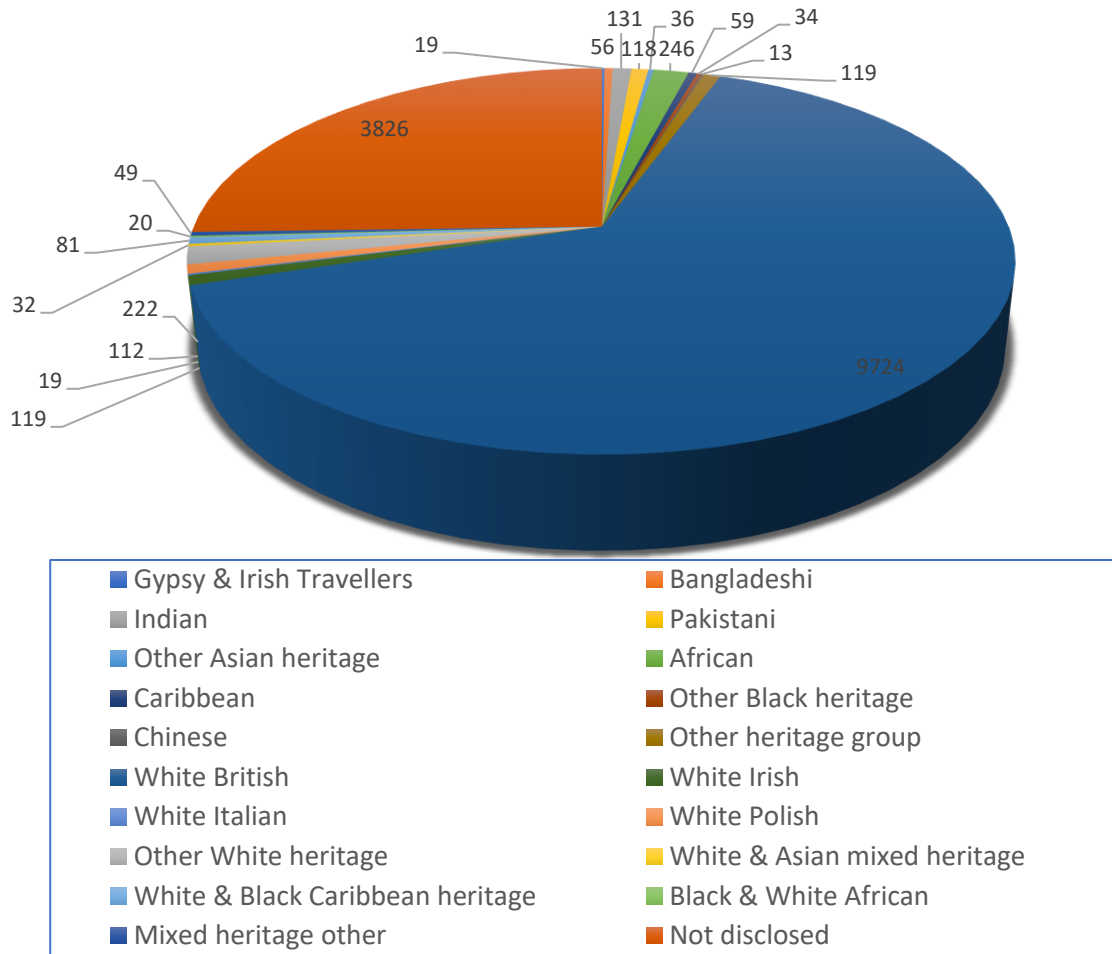


Disabilities disclosed by SBC tenants



- Deaf/hearing impaired
 - Mental Health difficulties
 - Not-disclosed other
 - Blind/Partially Sighted
 - None recorded
- Dyslexia
 - Wheelchair user/mobility issues
 - Unable to read or write
 - Unseen - i.e. diabetes

SBC Housing Tenant Ethnicities



Appendix 2 - Tenant Workshop feedback summary

You told us what matters the most to you

Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information in time, tell us what you have done, what you have spent • Understand tenants' priorities • Big decisions - involve all tenants • Communications - two way, consistent, clear and understandable • Be honest when you can't do something, and accountable when you fail
Keeping you safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a verification system for home visits. • keep us updated on safety • Ensure the right tradesperson, and enough time for the job
Listening to you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing to come to the community • Standards should reflect tenant priorities • Create events for tenants & officers to come together
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree with tenants what you will deliver and when • No 'phone numbers for Housing Officers • Takes ages to get through on the 'phone • Show us where you have spent the money • Involve tenants in procurement of services
Safe & clean neighbourhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other organisations • Clarify what the Neighbourhood Wardens do • Housing officers could use their volunteer hours in the community
Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tradespeople should be better behaved when they come into our homes • Work with other organisations - such as Age UK • Don't stereotype because of where we live
Anti-social behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle ASB, safe & clean neighbourhoods will follow • This is not just a Housing issue, involve the Council • How do we contact ASB officers? • Better design, landscaping and lighting • Work with Youth Services

Appendix 3 - A selection of comments from tenants at the workshops:

Improving communications:

'I know when you've listened to me because something happens'.

'We see no feedback from our suggestions'.

'Improve communication about repairs & keep people aware of planned maintenance – windows in poor condition and don't open'.

'Use community cafes to discuss / explain letters sent to tenants, not everyone can read.'

'Update me by email and on Council's website.'

'I like the online reporting facility and use it out of hours.'

Getting it right first time:

'Be a better landlord by dealing with things correctly – i.e. repairs or rent issues.'

'Do the repairs on time, and, on the date you stated, don't let us down.'

'If you can't solve my problem, at least put me in the right direction.'

'Stop sending repair staff to deal with repairs that they have no idea what to do with.'

Feedback and Information sharing:

'When leaving voicemail messages and sending emails we expect to hear back – this doesn't always happen.'

'Have an open-door policy, help desk or drop in.'

'Would like to be able to go into Council offices – have at least one desk open for drop ins – can't get through on the 'phone.'

'We want the neighbourhood wardens back to work on the estates – not voids, will help with neighbourhood issues.'

Respect:

...'no help with resolving issues – in four years have only seen my housing officer once and get no response to my emails.'

'The bin men leave my bin and recycling boxes strewn about the road when they empty them, after I have left them neatly in my gateway – why can't they return them as they

found them? It usually means that the box lids are halfway down the road and have been driven over and shattered by passing cars.'

'Nice to do the right thing & show you care.'

'Tenants don't get listened to – no matter what the reason.'

What do you like about where you live

'Community spirit.'

'Free café.'

'Good neighbourhood in a lovely area.'

'Friendliness and cleanliness.'

'I like where I live in Penhill and will not put up with people trying to wreck it all.'

Volunteering opportunities.'