

Together with Tenants

Our draft plan

Your feedback needed by 19 April

20 February 2019

About this plan

The National Housing Federation is the membership body for housing associations in England. Our housing association members provide two and a half million homes for more than six million people.

This draft plan explains the changes housing associations are considering making with the aim of creating a stronger, more balanced relationship with tenants and residents. We'd like to hear views from tenants, residents, housing associations and stakeholders on these changes and how they should be put into action.

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Why is change needed?

Recently, housing associations have faced a number of questions about their relationship with tenants and residents. The conversation following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower exposed some real differences in how people feel about living in social housing and their relationship with their social housing landlord. These questions include:

- Are tenants and residents listened to when things go wrong with their home or the service they receive?
- Do they have the chance to influence decisions that are made about their home or the services they receive?
- What can they do if they don't think their landlord is taking their concerns seriously?

Housing associations work hard to create a positive relationship with their tenants and residents, alongside aiming to provide safe, decent and affordable homes. The sector has a longstanding commitment to engaging with tenants and residents, and there are many great examples of how housing associations have shaped their organisations around the needs and views of the people they house.

However, housing associations know they do not always get it right for everyone and are not always as accountable as they should be to their tenants and residents. They also recognise the lack of consistency between landlords. Some tenants and residents have said their landlord feels distant, and this has led to a lack of trust in housing associations in some places.

Housing associations cannot do their job properly without the input, help and support of their tenants and residents.

The Federation has been working with tenants, residents, tenant representative groups, our members and others to understand what practical change is needed to address these questions.

We have been working closely with the Government to understand what other changes will help protect and strengthen the interests and rights of tenants and residents in social housing. We support stronger consumer regulation and improving routes for redress, as outlined in the Government's Social Housing Green Paper.

We also think it is important that tenants and residents have a strong collective voice, which is why we support the A Voice for Tenants steering group and its aim to establish a national body for tenants.

Housing associations want to take action as soon as possible to build a stronger relationship with tenants and residents. This is why we are seeking views on this draft plan now, while we continue to work alongside the Government.

Building a stronger relationship – our draft plan

To build a stronger relationship, it is vitally important that housing associations operate in a way that:

- values the voice and experience of tenants and residents
- is open and transparent in terms of how they act and share information
- welcomes challenge and is honest about where they need to improve.

To do this, housing association boards need to be properly connected to the people they house – including those who may be harder to reach – and have a clear understanding of how the homes and services they provide are experienced by their tenants and residents. There also needs to be a culture of respect across the whole organisation.

The views and voices of tenants and residents are vital to ensuring housing associations are delivering homes and services that meet the needs of communities. Tenants and residents can not only help identify where improvement is required, but play a key role in making changes happen that will benefit whole communities as well as individuals.

The actions set out in this draft plan:

- introduce new expectations at board level
- set out clear commitments for tenants and residents
- give tenants and residents a louder voice, a stronger role in scrutiny, and more influence locally and nationally
- provide a clear link to regulation.

The four proposed actions are:

1. A new requirement in the National Housing Federation Code of Governance for boards to be accountable to their tenants and residents.
2. A new Together with Tenants Charter setting out what tenants and residents can expect from their housing association landlord.
3. Tenant and resident oversight and scrutiny of the charter, with a report on how their landlord is doing against the charter commitments.
4. A closer link with regulation.

Further details on each action are listed in the following sections of this plan.

Alongside these actions, we are working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to convene an independent tenant advisory panel, whose remit will be to guide the development of this plan and how it is put into action.

1. New requirement in the Code of Governance

A strong commitment from housing association leadership to valuing the voice and experience of tenants and residents is essential to creating a stronger relationship.

We intend to formalise this commitment and will be consulting later this year on the introduction of a new requirement to [the Code of Governance](#) produced by the National Housing Federation, demonstrating that housing associations are serious about change.

The regulation of housing associations requires them to adopt a governance code, and the Federation's code is the mostly widely used. Not only will a new requirement in this code make clear that boards are responsible for ensuring they are accountable to their tenants and residents, but they will also need to evidence how they are compliant with this requirement. One way of evidencing this compliance would be for the housing association to sign up to, and deliver on the commitments of, the Together with Tenants Charter.

2. Together with Tenants Charter

A stronger relationship needs clear commitments and expectations, relating to all aspects of tenants' and residents' experience – from living in a decent home, to being treated with respect, and knowing what to do when things go wrong.

The table below sets out eight commitments that housing associations would be asked to adopt. While housing associations would be strongly encouraged to sign up to these commitments, it would remain voluntary. However, if a housing association does not adopt the charter, then the Federation's Code of Governance would make clear that it would need another mechanism for ensuring it is compliant with the requirement to be as accountable as possible to its tenants and residents.

These commitments are deliberately simple and straightforward, making it as easy as possible for people to relate them to their own experience. These are the core commitments that tenants and residents have told us they should have the right to expect, regardless of their landlord or where they live. Individual housing associations may choose to complement these core commitments with additional commitments or specific standards they would agree with their own tenants and residents.

These commitments draw on the existing consumer standards set out by the Regulator of Social Housing, and in some instances go further. Bringing them together in a clear, simple way, making sure they focus on experience rather than process, and raising their profile, is intended to deliver meaningful change for tenants and residents.

Commitments	
1	Every tenant and resident has the right to be treated with respect.
2	Every tenant and resident has the right to a decent, safe home and quality service.
3	Every tenant and resident has the right to be listened to and have their view heard on decisions that affect their community, home and the services they receive.
4	Every tenant and resident has the right to know how the organisation is run, how decisions are made, and how they can get involved.
5	Collectively, tenants and residents have the right to influence decisions that affect their community, home and the services they receive.
6	Every tenant and resident will have simple, clear and accessible routes for raising issues, making complaints and seeking redress.
7	Every tenant and resident will receive support and advice when things go wrong or their expectations aren't met.
8	Every tenant and resident will have access to the information they need to make informed decisions and hold their landlord to account.

A more detailed description of the commitments and how they may be delivered is set out in [Appendix A](#).

3. Tenant and resident oversight and scrutiny

The charter will provide a consistent framework for housing association boards to assess whether they are meeting the expectations of their tenants and residents, but in itself will not necessarily create a stronger, more balanced relationship. An important factor will be tenants and residents having the power, information and agency to hold their landlord to account, and the charter will provide a mechanism to make this happen.

Tenants and residents are better placed than anyone to take a view on the homes and services their landlord is providing and must be trusted to do so. The charter will provide a mechanism for tenants and residents to play this vital role in holding their landlord to account.

To do this, tenants and residents will have a strong role in scrutinising the performance of their landlord against the commitments in the charter. Tenants and residents would report to the housing association board, who in turn would be expected to respond and put plans in place to address any

issues. This should be done in a transparent and public way and could be part of the annual review against the Code of Governance.

How this works will be down to the individual housing association in discussion with tenants and residents, recognising that many already have tenants on boards, scrutiny boards or advisory positions. However, it is important that reporting is inclusive and captures and reflects the views of as many tenants and residents as possible, rather than just those who are already engaged with their landlord.

4. Closer link to regulation

Housing associations are already required to be compliant with the consumer standards set out by the Social Housing Regulator. We support strengthening the regulation of these consumer standards, as outlined in [our response to the Social Housing Green Paper](#). This may mean the regulator reviews compliance with the standards in more places, not just where there is evidence of serious detriment.

If tenants and residents believe that a housing association is failing to meet the commitments in the charter, and does not put plans in place to improve, this might provide useful evidence for the regulator, indicating where further work and intervention may be necessary to protect the interests of tenants and residents and ensure issues are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

How the views of tenants and residents will shape this work

To help build the new stronger relationship between tenants, residents and landlords, the Federation is working with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to convene a new tenant advisory panel. The panel will sit independently of the Federation to provide advice and challenge and guide this work as it develops. Applications are open to all housing association tenants and residents and we want to ensure a diverse and inclusive representation. The deadline for applications is Friday 15 March and [more information can be found on the Centre for Public Scrutiny website](#).

This panel will play a crucial role in the Together with Tenants work as it is rolled out across England.

We are also advocating a strong national voice for social housing tenants and residents through our support for the A Voice for Tenants steering group and our ongoing close collaboration with tenant representative organisations throughout the development of this plan.

Sharing your views

This plan is only a draft. It has been put together to help prompt as many different views and voices as possible, particularly from tenants and residents.

In order to inform the next stage of the plan and begin to create a new relationship between tenants, residents and housing association, we need your views and help.

Please share your views by 19 April using one of the following methods:

- **Tenants and residents** can participate in our [online questionnaire](#) or [get in touch with us](#) directly to discuss their feedback.
- **Housing associations** can participate in [one of our member workshops](#), share their feedback through our [online questionnaire](#), or [get in touch with us](#) directly.
- **Stakeholders** can use our [online questionnaire](#) to share their views, or [get in touch with us](#) to discuss their feedback.

Next steps

We would like to hear your views by Friday 19 April 2019. Based on the feedback, this draft plan and charter will be revised. The tenant advisory panel and other tenants and residents will help shape and guide this process.

The Federation will support [more than 40 housing associations](#), together with their tenants and residents, to test how the plan and charter work in practice from April 2019, taking on board feedback from this consultation. This will allow us to make further changes based on their experience before a wider rollout.

We welcome further interest from housing associations who would like to join as early adopters. If you would like to find out more, [please visit our website](#).

Questions

Questions for tenants and residents

You can respond to these questions either via our [online questionnaire](#), or by [emailing us your answers](#).

1. Do you think the four actions outlined in this draft plan (see list below for reference) are the right actions?
 - **A change to the National Housing Federation Code of Governance** – your landlord’s board would agree to be as accountable as possible to all residents and tenants.
 - **A new Together with Tenants Charter** – your landlord would set out, in a clear and publicly available document, what you can expect from them.
 - **Tenant and resident oversight and scrutiny of the charter** – tenants and residents can publicly report on how your landlord is doing.
 - **A closer link with regulation** – tenant and resident oversight of the charter can provide useful evidence to the regulator about whether your landlord is compliant with consumer standards.
 - 1.1 Please let us know if you have any further comments on the actions.
2. Does the Together with Tenants Charter cover the right issues?
3. Is there anything missing from the charter that you feel you have the right to expect from your housing association?
4. Do you have any suggestions for how the wording of the charter could be improved or made clearer?
5. Do you agree that tenants and residents should have a role in reporting on housing associations’ performance against the charter?
 - 5.1 Do you have any suggestions for how this could work well in practice?
6. Do you agree that tenant and resident oversight of the charter should have a role in regulation, including providing evidence to the Regulator of Social Housing where relevant?
 - 6.1 Do you think this role should be strengthened?
7. Do you have any further comments or suggestions on linking tenant and resident oversight of performance to regulation?
8. If you are interested in applying to be part of the independent Tenant Advisory Board, please send us your email address.
9. Is there anything we’ve missed? Or do you have any further comments?

Questions for housing associations

You can respond to these questions either via our [online questionnaire](#), or by [emailing us your answers](#).

1. Do you think the four actions outlined in the draft plan (require accountability in the Code of Governance; create a new Together with Tenants Charter; give tenants and residents oversight and scrutiny of the charter; link this more closely with regulation) are the right actions?
 - 1.1 Please let us know if you have any further comments on these actions.
2. Does the Together with Tenants Charter cover the right issues?
3. Is there anything missing from the charter that you feel your residents have the right to expect from you?
4. Do you have any suggestions for how the wording of the charter could be improved or made clearer?
5. Do you agree that tenants and residents should have a role in reporting on your housing associations' performance against the charter?
 - 5.1 Do you have any suggestions for how this could work well in practice?
6. Do you agree that tenant and resident oversight should link to regulation?
 - 6.1 Do you think this link should be strengthened?
7. Do you have any further comments or suggestions to make on linking tenant and resident oversight of performance to regulation?
8. Please indicate the size of your organisation:
 - up to 500 homes
 - 500 – 1,000 homes
 - 1,000 – 5,000 homes
 - 5,000 – 10,000 homes
 - more than 10,000 homes.
9. Is there anything we've missed? Or do you have further comments?

Questions for stakeholders

You can respond to these questions either via our [online questionnaire](#), or by [emailing us your answers](#).

1. Do you think the four actions outlined in this draft plan (require accountability in the Code of Governance; create a new Together with Tenants Charter; give residents oversight and scrutiny of the charter; link this more closely with regulation) are the right actions?

1.1 Please let us know if you have any further comments on the actions.

2. Does the Together with Tenants Charter cover the right issues?

3. Is there anything missing from the charter that you feel tenants and residents have the right to expect from housing associations?

4. Do you have any suggestions for how the wording of the charter could be improved or made clearer?

5. Do you agree that tenants and residents should have a role in reporting on performance against the charter?

5.1 Do you have any suggestions for how this could work well in practice?

6. Do you agree that tenant and resident oversight should link to regulation?

6.1 Do you think this link should be strengthened?

7. Do you have any further comments or suggestions to make on linking tenant and resident of performance to regulation?

8. Is there anything we've missed? Or do you have further comments?

Appendix A – Together with Tenants Charter

Commitment	Description	Ideas for the 'what' and 'how'
Every tenant and resident has the right to be treated with respect.	All tenants have the right to be treated with respect in all of their interactions with their landlord.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational values and ways of working agreed locally between tenants and residents and landlords. Clear standards setting out what tenants and residents can expect when they interact with their landlord.
Every tenant and resident has the right to a decent, safe home, and a good quality service.	All tenants have the right to live in a home that is demonstrably decent and safe and to receive high-quality services from their landlord.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decent Homes Standard. Repairs and maintenance standard. Void standard. Asset investment and management strategy. Information on fire safety and procedures. KPIs as agreed locally.
Every tenant and resident has the right to be listened to and have their view heard on decisions that affect their community, home and the services they receive.	All tenants and residents have the right to be listened to, even if they have not engaged in the way suggested by their landlord, both individually and collectively, and for their concerns to be meaningfully responded to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector support for a national tenant voice. Robust mechanisms to provide assurance that all tenants and residents can communicate with their landlord, including outside of 'official' channels. Service standards (developed with and tested by tenants and residents) on interaction and response, with regular reporting against the standard, Effective scrutiny, oversight and board arrangements – providing regular feedback to tenants about how their views have been taken into account.
Every tenant and resident has the right to know how the organisation is run, how decisions are made and how they can get involved.	All tenants and residents have access to clear information about the governance and leadership of their landlord, decision-making processes at all levels of the organisation and how they can get involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenant and resident involvement strategy. Information on decision-making processes, key decisions that have been made (summary in regular reports/annual report), information on key staff roles and board members.
Collectively, tenants and residents have the right to influence decisions that affect	All tenants and residents have the right to influence decisions that affect their communities, homes and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenant and resident involvement strategy. Tenant-facing policies, such as repairs and maintenance and complaints, are developed

<p>their community, home and the services they receive.</p>	<p>services, and landlords proactively provide a wide range of opportunities for tenants to exert influence.</p>	<p>in partnership with tenants and residents and regularly reviewed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms for tenant and resident involvement and scrutiny are varied, flexible and actively encouraged, and it is clear how tenants and residents can get involved through formal and informal routes.
<p>Every tenant and resident will have simple, clear and accessible routes for raising issues and making complaints and seeking redress.</p>	<p>The routes for raising issues and making complaints are simple, clear and accessible, and tenants and residents have a good understanding of how they work and what happens next.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information clearly available on the website, in any communications, and in tenancy/leasehold agreements. • Clear and effective complaints policies developed with and tested by tenants and residents. • Service standard on complaints (developed with and tested by tenants and residents), with regular reporting against the standard. • Clear escalation process (ombudsman and regulator).
<p>Every tenant and resident will receive support and advice when things go wrong or their expectations aren't met.</p>	<p>Support and advice when things go wrong is freely available to tenants and residents, and landlords engage proactively and transparently with independent routes for mediation and redress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information clearly available on the website, in any communications, and in tenancy/leasehold agreements. • Complaints policy and service standards. • Clear escalation routes. • Clear signposting to external/independent routes.
<p>Every tenant and resident will have access to the information they need to make informed decisions and hold their landlord to account.</p>	<p>Landlords commit to openness and transparency – developing a standard set of information they will provide based on what is important to tenants and residents in ways that reflect their preferences. This may include information on performance, finances, staff structure, decision-making, governance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency commitment – what landlords will share with tenants and residents and how (i.e. not just putting it on website) – could include relevant policies, organisational and financial information.