

Modernising The Tenant Customer Experience within the Wokingham Borough

Created
By
Tenant
Volunteers



TENANT CHARTER



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Modernising the tenant customer experience within the Wokingham Borough:

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The Purpose of The Tenant Charter

The Tenant Charter was initially created and published by the Involved Tenants (now Tenant Volunteers) in 2019. In 2022, we (the Tenant Volunteers) reviewed the Charter and have identified several factors that make it timely to reflect on the future of housing services for council tenants and publish an updated version of the Tenant Charter:

- **The Grenfell Tower Disaster**
 - There have been emerging lessons from the Disaster and subsequent Grenfell Tower Enquiry. Notably the need for a greater focus on:
 - Health and Safety through the new Building Regulator,
 - Tenant Involvement working closely with the Regulator for Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman Service and,
 - Transparency over landlord decision-making ensuring that more information is shared with all Tenants.
- **The Social Housing White Paper**
 - The government's document '*The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper*' published by the Ministry of Housing Communities Local Government (now called the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) was published in November 2020 and requests:
 - Enhanced consumer regulation applicable to councils and housing associations.
 - Landlords to raise service standards, levels of resident engagement and customer satisfaction.

Link to documents for more information: [The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper)
(www.gov.uk)



Link to documents for more information: [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities)
(www.gov.uk)



- **Digital Transformation**
 - There are emerging opportunities for enhanced communications through digital transformation of service delivery and enhanced resident engagement in respect of

increased transparency and an improved tenant customer experience especially regarding accessibility.

- **Demographic Trends**
 - Social trends such as an ageing population, increasing demand for disability and social care support, increasing customer expectations and the rapid rise of social media platforms.

We believe that Wokingham Borough Council and the tenants need to respond to these challenges by working together to plan for the modernisation of housing services over the next decade and beyond if:

- current levels of Tenant Satisfaction are to be maintained / enhanced / monitored, and
- opportunities to increase engagement are to be realised.

This charter sets out the views of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Tenant Volunteers on what we feel is needed to achieve the above and to improve the customer experience. It is intended as a series of aspirations, rather than demands, and to stimulate broader discussions within the council as a corporate body.

Some of our proposals can be implemented relatively easily, some will require additional funding and others will require corporate agreement by full council.

We recommend that Wokingham Borough Council's progress in terms of addressing this Charter is formally reported to full Council each year and a full review completed every three years.

Acknowledgements

This Charter has been produced by the Tenant Volunteers of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

This revised and updated Tenant Charter was reviewed and created by the Tenant Involvement Strategy Group. It has been signed-off by all the Tenant Volunteers and the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP).

The drafting of the Tenant Charter was undertaken in partnership with the Tenancy Involvement Team.

Special thanks are due to Simon Price, Kim Jakubiszyn and Rosalynn Funnell of the Wokingham Borough Council Housing department for their assistance and continued support in this project and their ongoing commitment to effective tenant engagement in the Borough.

Aspirations

1) Tackling the Stigma associated with being a Social Housing Tenant

The definition of social stigma is a strong feeling of disapproval that most people in a society have about something, especially when this is unfair.

This stigma impacts on the perception of council housing tenants by others and can be further categorised in the following ways:

- **Stigma of being a Social Housing Tenant**
 - Many tenants recall the days when council housing was sought-after and provided accommodation for different social classes, united in the need for a family home. Even today, the offer of a home in the Council's new developments is an exciting life-enhancing opportunity.
 - Sadly, over the last forty years the image of council housing has suffered, and it is seen by many, especially in the media, as second-class accommodation comprised of run-down neighbourhoods inhabited by unemployed individuals involved in crime!

- **Stigma of living in Sheltered Housing Accommodation**

Sheltered housing is accommodation specifically designed for older or disabled people to allow them to live independently. It usually consists of self-contained flats with communal facilities. Schemes vary in size, but most offer a range of self-contained apartments or bungalows on one site.

- When people hear Sheltered Housing Accommodation, they think of Care Homes.
 - In the last decade we have seen more people moving into this type of accommodation who are still working, are still very active, and living more independently.
 - We recommend that Sheltered Housing policies and buildings are reviewed as they do not reflect the current and future needs of older Tenants. When Tenancies for these properties are offered, it should be made very clear that you will be living in a sheltered scheme with access to the Floating Support Team.
- **Stigma of living on a Low Income**
 - Tenants and Residents who live on lower income are stigmatised in many ways, mainly by the use of stigmatising language such as "Poverty, being Poor, Living in Crisis, Being a Shirker, a Scrounger etc."
- **Stigma of being a Tenant Volunteer**
 - when a Tenant or Resident volunteers with any organisation, there is a perception that they 'work' for them.
 - A Tenant Volunteer gives their time for free to support and help Wokingham Borough Council, other Tenants and staff to improve services for Tenants.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council tackle the issue of stigmatisation through:

- a proactive media campaign to challenge negative perceptions of council housing in the local and regional media – partly through generating regular information for the media on how

tenants actively maintain their communities and help support disadvantaged residents. The media work would also allow the speedy correction of inaccurate information.

- an overhaul of the language used by councillors and council colleagues when referring to council housing – abandoning all references to ‘estates’ in favour of more positive terms such as ‘communities’ or ‘neighbourhoods.’
- specifying a requirement - in commercial and employment contracts – that contractors, service delivery partners and employees treat tenants fairly and do not stigmatise them.
- maximising the attractiveness of future housing schemes by increasing the level of tenant involvement in their design, amenities, and transport links, by working with local tenants in the monitoring of appearance and maintenance of all neighbourhoods. This could be through direct engagement, face-to-face or through digital means (social media, surveys and focus groups).
- investment in activities – like community engagement events – that celebrate local communities and enhance volunteer engagement. This may include the sponsorship of Holidays, Activities and Food (HAF) events and other activities that support communities in need (supporting the Wokingham Borough Council Anti-Poverty Strategy).

2) Communications with Tenants and Residents across the Borough

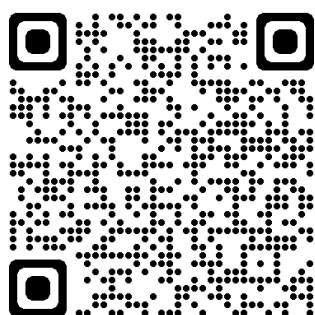
We would like all communications with Tenants and Residents across the Borough to be clear, understandable, accessible, and meaningful – we encourage consultation, and would appreciate teams working together to send one set of consultation at a time.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council improve communications by:

- Ensuring consultation is completed on anything that effects Tenants and Residents. We would encourage focus groups (face-to-face or on Teams), digital engagement through social media / website and local roadshows to achieve this.
- Ensuring council staff ask Tenants and Residents how they would like to be engaged with – digital by choice as well as face to face, paper format, telephone, mobile phone text message etc. (Please remember that not everyone within the Borough is digitally active.)

CIH document about the digital options
and digital by choice:

<https://www.cih.org/publications/going-digital-gearing-up-for-the-future>



Options for Communications to indicate
the range of formats suggested:
UNESCO

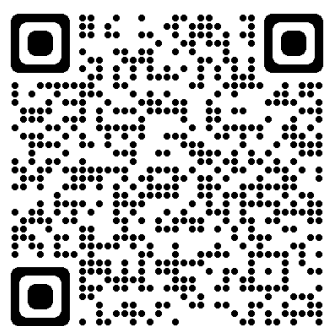


- Ensure departments across the Council communicate effectively with each other to support Tenants and Residents – for example the benefits team working in partnership with housing and Adult Social Care.
- Equality and Inclusion is important within all areas of Housing and the Council, especially with accessible communications. We would like the Council to invest in this area, looking at supporting tenants and residents with sensory needs through videos, audio description, the availability of documents in larger print and British Sign Language as a norm for the website and any digital engagement.
- We recognise that Wokingham Borough has become more diverse because of the various resettlement and refugee projects, and we need to ensure that all communications are designed from the beginning as accessible to all. Whether through the choice of languages

available for each document, website translation services and telephone translation services. We would like these to become a normal part of every service and not just an add on at the end of a document. Some websites have an automatic translation option, could this be looked in to?

- We would like a set of service standards to show Tenants and Residents how they will be engaged with and show clear deadlines for instance: 5 working days to acknowledge after first contact followed by 10 working days to complete a full and thorough response (if needed). This should include guidance for staff members on out of office etiquette including out of office messages.
- Performance Framework data is currently scrutinised by Tenant Volunteers on a monthly basis – moving towards sharing this data with all Tenants through digital means (social media, Housing Matters etc.).
- Work in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council to introduce a new more accessible website that encourages Tenants and Residents to engage.
- Supplement this by broadening the range of communication channels to include Face time, WhatsApp, Microsoft Messenger, Microsoft Teams plus on-line housing surgeries with housing or benefits staff and ‘virtual chat room’ debates between councillors, staff and Tenant Volunteers.
- Ensure an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment is completed for all Policies and Service Improvements to ensure Wokingham Borough Council is compliant to the Equality Act 2010.

Link for further information: [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010)



Not all Tenants have a visible disability and require format changes to communications.



- When creating a new policy within Wokingham Borough Council, that effects Tenants (and Residents), we would like those customers to be involved from the beginning, including reviewing, planning, and signing off any new or amended policies. Meaningful consultation is important to ensure Tenant Satisfaction and continued engagement.

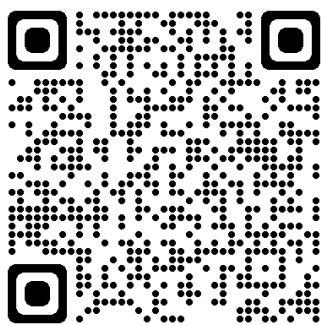
- Wokingham Borough Council have been working with [The First Word](#) to ensure the tone of communications to Tenants and Residents is more friendly and less corporate. We would like Tenant Volunteers to be trained alongside staff members to ensure we are able to continue to sign off communications and ensure they have been 'First Worded' by us! We would recommend that Wokingham Borough Council use [The First Word](#) readability test and ask that all communications meet the grade of 65 and above – Plain English. This ensures we continue to be compliant to the Regulatory Standards.

3) Greater Transparency regarding Health and Safety Inspection Results

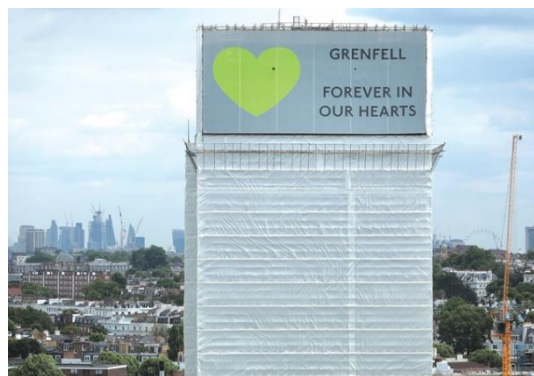
The Grenfell Tower disaster has led to a renewed focus on the health and safety of council and housing association properties. The government's Social Housing White Paper (as mentioned in the Purpose of this Tenant Charter), sets out the guidelines and suggested changes for the sector to ensure greater transparency and Tenant Engagement for Social Housing. Specifically, it mentions the creation of a new Building Regulator and enhanced powers for the Regulator for Social Housing, please see below for more information.

Notably, it mentions the creation of a new Building Regulator and enhanced powers for the Regulator for Social Housing. On the 22nd June 2022, the Building Safety Act named HSE (Health and Safety Executive) as the new Building Safety Regulator in England.

Link for further information: [Building Safety Regulator - HSE](#)



The Grenfell Tower disaster occurred on the 14th June 2017 in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.



The Government is proposing a new, Tenant Satisfaction, Regulatory Standard to be implemented by 2025. This would require that data on tenants' perception and satisfaction continues to be gathered and results made available to the tenants by their landlord. The STAR Survey is currently in place and sent out every other year to gather the same data, but the new standard will request this data more often and ensure Landlords share this data, in live formats, more often. This will increase the amount of data collected regarding health and safety compliance and require the sharing of these results to increase the engagement and scrutiny from tenants.

[Tenant satisfaction measures: what we are proposing and how to have your say - summary \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK](#)
(www.gov.uk)



We welcome Wokingham Borough Council's current health and safety practice in the following areas:

- Installation of safety aids – fire, smoke, and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms - as standard in all new/existing council homes
- Annual testing of gas appliances and alarms in all council homes
- Annual testing of electric appliances in sheltered schemes and communal areas and community facilities.
- Five-year regular testing of electrical appliances (sockets and wiring) within general needs homes (Decent Homes).
- Weekly water for Legionnaire's disease in communal shared water use) in sheltered schemes and communal areas and community facilities

However, we would like to see Wokingham Borough Council be more transparent about the outcomes of these tests by:

- Publishing smoke, gas, electric and Carbon Monoxide monitoring inspection results as part of the digital personalised customer record (if possible). This could be shared as part of an annual report and regular social media updates with anonymised data which would bring practice in line with the Social Housing White Paper and Regulatory Standards.
- Publishing fire safety inspection results, as recommended by the Hackitt review. This could be as part of the accessible online personalised customer record.
- The Fire Safety Act 2021 (the Act) received Royal Assent on 29 April 2021 and commenced on 16 May 2022. The Act amends the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the Fire Safety Order). We would like the service to review themselves against this bill and consult the findings to the relevant tenant volunteer groups. This will have a series of recommendations that will need to be shared regularly to all tenants.
- Performance Framework data is currently scrutinised by the Tenant Volunteers on a monthly basis. However, this data needs to be shared more widely to all tenants through digital means such as social media, Housing Matters etc.)

4) Modernising Tenant Engagement Techniques to Increase Active Involvement

Traditionally, tenant engagement has been largely based around physical meetings and community engagement events which means that not everyone is able or available to attend.

We recognise this issue but also celebrate the adaptations made to tenant engagement since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and understand that these have been successful in making engagement more accessible and flexible to tenants.

Tenant Engagement also includes walkabouts, housing officers engaging with people at their door, Housing Matters magazine surveys and satisfaction surveys

As work has begun to increase active involvement in a variety of formats, we would like Wokingham Borough Council to work with us to ensure progress is made to engage with more tenants.

We recently formed a new Tenant Complaints Panel to ensure Tenants are actively engaged within the complaints process.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council take the following practical steps:

- Increase the number of tenant Volunteers through a variety of involvement opportunities including face-to-face and digital engagement.
- To encourage more digital by choice engagement through online surveys, online focus groups and social media engagement. With the options of telephone and paper surveys if needed. This could include social media campaigns on particular subjects such as an anti-stigma campaign (Aspiration 1)
- Although we have multiple ways of getting involved through the formal groups (see Conclusion for more details of these groups) and we still want to encourage tenants to join us on these groups, helping us to scrutinise and challenge performance and enhance services. By offering more opportunities to engage, Tenants can also become involved in a more varied and flexible ways (accordingly to how much time they have to give).
- Create a link with the (Wokingham Borough) Resident Equalities Forum - which is an external group that is formed of representatives from each of the protected characteristics within the Equality Act 2010.
- Continue and create new links with local community organisations, Registered Providers, Charities, and any other organisations that can increase active involvement with some of those groups that are currently not represented within engagement structure.
- We would like investment to engage with those people who do not currently have a voice or need support to be heard ensuring that they have a say in service improvements and satisfaction surveys. For example, young people, the GRT community etc.
- Ensure an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment is completed for all engagement activities to ensure Wokingham Borough Council is compliant to the Equality Act 2010.

[Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)



5) Identifying Future Patterns of Tenant Housing Need and Demand

Planning for the future means recognising trends such as an ageing population, more single adult households, increased diversity of residents and so on and matching this demand with new housing supply.

It also involves recognising changing inter-generational housing and service experience expectations. In simple terms, our children and particularly our grandchildren will have different needs in terms of the housing service provided.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council pursue the issue of future patterns of housing demands through:

- Greater choice of the types of housing and the tenancy terms being offered - not everyone wants the same thing – As Tenant Volunteers, we are aware that altering government legislation is difficult, but we will lobby through various means including membership of the Residents Panel - Association of Retained Council Houses (ARCH).
- Consultation when planning and building new homes and refurbishing others to become adaptable homes that mean tenants don't have to move in response to age or disability
- ensuring that new or refurbished homes are designed to more carbon neutral standards – including but not limited to installation of solar panels, power walls (Powerwall is an integrated battery system that stores your solar energy for backup protection when the grid goes down. Your system detects outages and automatically recharges with sunlight to keep your appliances running for days), rainwater butts and so on.
- We also aspire to greater tenant involvement in the design and planning for future tenant housing needs and demand.

We believe that council development planning will be improved:

- With Tenants having a greater role in strategic planning. This could be through consultation on development planning. This could be through the Tenant Volunteers working in partnership with the council's Strategic Housing Team. Working together analysing the research data that informs planning policy, particularly regarding projections of future housing need for social housing that meets the needs of the tenants.
- With Tenant Volunteers consistently being formally consulted on the allocations and lettings policy and practice – especially in any review of the 'banding system'.
- With Tenant Volunteers support the Council to become Carbon Neutral by 2030 and will do this in a number of ways, including encouraging the SAP ratings of the current properties to be taken from a C to a B (using Government funding where possible) and to encourage digital by choice to reduce the amount of wasted paper in the Borough.

6) Helping Tenants Manage their Personal Finances

Due to Government austerity, cost-of-living crisis, and the transition to Universal Credit allowing tenants receiving benefits to have their payments made directly to them, there is a need to support tenants to manage their finances more effectively.

Due to Government Austerity, the cost-of-living crisis and the transition to Universal Credit allowing tenants receiving benefits to have their payments made directly to them, there is a need to support tenants to manage their finance more effectively.

We believe that by helping tenants manage their finances more effectively the Council can increase tenancy sustainment and contribute in the longer term to the community in which they live.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council improve support to Tenants by tackling these issues via:

- Continuing to offer support to tenants, either by signposting or provided by Wokingham Borough Council direct.
- Signposting tenants to personal budgeting training courses that are free or low cost such as those provided by Wokingham Adult Education (more information can be found at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/libraries/reading-schemes-for-children-and-adults/adult-and-community-learning/>)
- Signposting to accessible money management apps available to tenants 'on demand' – to help them to understand their spending on recurring payments, assist with budget analysis and planning, or help with saving etc.
- Training and upskilling of staff on where to signpost tenants and residents to financial support.
- Continuing to provide the texting service to increase accessibility and provide additional ways of contacting the rents team.
- Continuing the support to Tenants via the Tenancy Sustainment Officers as a direct contact on financial management.

7) Creating an easy 'friction-free' Customer Experience for Tenants

We recognise that some of the most significant changes in human behaviour and customer expectations are being driven by the retail, online media, and technology sectors.

Mobile phones are widely used, for online shopping, banking, checking for the next bus and using social media and chat bots. Organisations are all working on how to make access to their apps / websites a much better and easier experience. QR Codes are now widely used within media, documents and policies and should be used to enhance the experience for anyone using mobile phones to access online content.

We recognise that transaction time is now as important as price to many consumers. Equally, the most successful retailers are reviewing their recruitment strategy for customer facing staff and increasing the number of transactions, that can be undertaken directly by the consumer on a 'self-service' basis. i.e. self-service scanners in supermarkets, where your loyalty card allows you to shop quicker and monitor your spending, providing an excellent customer experience, whilst allowing you to ensure you are still within your budget.

We would encourage Wokingham Borough Council to enhance the customer experience for all, leading to an increase in satisfaction for tenants and improving their relationship with their landlord.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council take practical steps to make the tenant customer experience easier and 'friction free' by:

- Recruiting council housing staff that are helpful, knowledgeable, with a commitment to customer service and a positive attitude. It is better to employ people with the right personality traits and then train them, than to base recruitment solely on the possession of formal qualifications.
- Having a Customer Delivery Officer and/or Housing Assistant as an initial point of contact for most telephone enquiries, with the ability to 'pass on' / have access to 'specialist officers' as required.
- Creating a standard Customer Service training programme that is mandatory for all officers of the Council with a specific additional training programme for Housing staff.
- Reviewing response time targets and steps to ensure that they are met in practice and that targets are agreed with Tenant Volunteers. Please see the Communications Aspiration for more information.
- Continue to provide a greater choice of ways to communicate with the Housing Service for tenants
- Review and development access to all council services to ensure accessibility, whether by telephone, email, online etc.
- Retaining the current face to face availability through pre-booked appointments.
- Promote and develop self-service for Tenants accessing housing services

- Self-service is now an integral part of our daily lives. Self-service check outs at supermarkets are second nature and in banking, self-service apps are widely used.
- The aim of 'self-service' is to encourage tenants to manage their accounts online.
- An online Tenants Hub / App would be ideal for them to be able to access services online 24/7, such as:
 - Check rent balance and view statements
 - Report repairs and make / change appointments
 - Check repairs history
 - Book a gas service and change appointments
 - Make a secure payment
 - Report anti-social behaviour
 - Report a change in circumstances
 - Log complaints and compliments
 - Landlord permissions for pets, satellite dishes etc.
 - Access information about the home (anything that is given out as part of your Tenancy pack) – such as how to use the central heating systems or where to locate stopcocks
 - Access a calendar of community events etc
- For self-service to be successful, tenants need to **actively use it**. This requires an easy-to-use platform, training videos and drop-in sessions, a marketing campaign, and the back-up option of speaking to staff for the percentage of the population that do not have access to the internet or whose disability prevents them from using online services. It also requires analytics and monitoring of how it is being used and barriers to its use.

Tenants are more likely to use self-service if other tenants, such as Tenant Volunteers and their groups, have been part of the team that design it and is consulted on the self-service offer.

We fully support the Customer Excellence project across the Council. We would like to ensure that Tenants are part of Customer Journeys and Customer Excellence projects to ensure consultation is completed as part of the continued partnership working.

8) Maximising the Accessibility of Council Housing Services

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council take practical steps to improve the accessibility of council housing services. We welcome the new Customer Excellence and First Word initiatives but think Wokingham Borough Council can and should go further.

Some of these steps involve changing how existing resources are deployed – others involve the use of new technology.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council increase accessibility by:

- Changes to the use of existing resources:
 - Freephone for all calls to council switchboard (like the freephone service that already exists for reporting repair requests)
 - Minimising call waiting times for housing services by ensuring that the Customer Delivery Officer / Housing Assistants / Call Handlers function is fully staffed – particularly at peak times
 - Review of existing and future resources (leaflets, posters and handbooks) / policies to ensure they are accessible by all, including an easy read version and the ability to change the language of any document once published online.
- Use of new technology
 - Introduction of a digital inclusion strategy to ensure that no tenant is left behind by the digital transformation of service delivery
 - Access to digital engagement / support at all Sheltered Properties ensuring Tenants are able to access training locally if requested.
 - Introduction of reporting apps – for repairs, Anti-social behaviour (ASB), neighbourhood condition – allowing photos of issues to be uploaded by tenants (as residents can already do in respect of reporting issues related to roads and highways)
 - Review of current ‘virtual customer service assistants aka chatbots’ to answer frequently asked questions (FAQ’s), direct customers to sources of information, perform simple tasks etc.in order to help tenants who have physical or learning disabilities or simply speed up call centre queues for everyone
 - Consultation / survey of Tenants and Residents should be digital by choice, i.e., available in different digital formats (email, mobile, WhatsApp, QR Code, Website) if the Tenant / Resident has access or in other formats such as by telephone or paper.

9) Giving Tenants Greater Choice on who does repairs and when?

The most important single issue for tenants is day-to-day responsive repairs. Some repairs will be 'qualifying work' which is the landlord's responsibility and others will fall to tenants to organise themselves.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council improve its repairs operations by:

- Introducing an accredited handyman service for 'non-qualifying work', providing tenants with a list of trusted tradespeople who could do jobs which are not the landlord's responsibility and building upon existing Wokingham Borough Council handyman arrangements for social care.
- Enabling tenants to order and cancel repairs directly with contractors for 'qualifying work' (Landlord's Responsibility)
- Enabling tenants to be offered a range of hourly time-banded appointment options when they negotiate repair times with contractors.
- Tenant Volunteers would also like Wokingham Borough Council to investigate the benefits of having a mixture of maintenance contractors – prime commercial, a directly employed labour force and (to support local economic development and help tackle climate change) local small contractors and handymen.
- Supporting Tenants and Tenant Volunteers to continue to be involved in the selection of prime commercial contractors holding any contractors accountable, if theirs or the work of any sub-contractors is substandard! This would be picked up by Tenant Volunteers (as live mystery shoppers) via complaints and monitored by the complaints panel, the Repairs and Maintenance Group and the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel.
- Ensuring all Tenants have greater access to repairs reports (link to Aspiration 3)
- Ensuring all Tenants have clear communications ensuring contractors also adhere to aspiration 2 and ensuring tenants are alerted to repairs and have the ability to reorganise when inconvenient? Tenants should also have a greater choice in the communication formats sent to them (link to aspiration 2, 7 and 8)

The combined effect of these changes would place council tenants in an equal position to private owner-occupiers when commissioning repairs and provide a modest contribution to tackling stigma. (Link to aspiration 1)

10) Developing a Protocol for the Analysis and Protection of Tenant Data

The objective of Wokingham Borough Council Tenant Volunteers is to help Wokingham Borough Council build the level of trust required to gain tenant consent to use their personal data for housing data analysis.

The development of machine learning, artificial intelligence, sentiment analysis and the science of data analytics now enables councils to find out more about their tenants' circumstances, needs and aspirations and to use that data to improve housing services.

However, this increased use of personal data creates increased risks of data security and accidental non-compliance with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) [Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and UK rules which, together, place the responsibility on the council to hold an individual's data securely and with their consent.

We would like to see Wokingham Borough Council improve by:

- Using data analytics to predict future housing service need and demand
- Enabling tenants to hold Wokingham Borough Council accountable to the GDPR and by ensuring they are compliant when processing Tenant data collection, analysis, and findings
- Ensuring the Tenant Volunteers have the opportunity to regularly scrutinise and challenge Wokingham Borough Council through the analysis of performance figures and complaints data, looking for patterns, learning and service improvement suggestions.
- Involving tenants in the development of the Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) required under GDPR which identify and analyse how data privacy might be affected by specific actions related to the capture and analysis of personal data
- Developing a housing-led protocol for the use and protection of data held on tenants based on Information Commissioner (ICO) guidance and the practical execution of ICO guidance as set out in Transparency and Trust – the 2017 industry standard HouseMark guide to data protection in social housing

Conclusion

What is a Tenant Volunteer and what does it involve?

Definition of *Volunteering*

The definition of volunteering that the Wokingham Borough Council Tenant Volunteers have adopted is as follows:

We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment and communities. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.

This can include formal and informal volunteering across the Housing Service as well as wider community participation and social action. Everyone has the right to volunteer, and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.

By volunteering to become a Tenant Volunteer and working in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council you can help improve the services to Tenants.

You will also learn how the Council works and begin to see the bigger picture and how complicated things can be.

Volunteering can be incredibly rewarding and some of the benefits of being involved are:

- The chance to meet new people
- Social opportunities
- Gaining confidence
- Understanding what is going on in your community and having a positive input
- Gaining new skills through training
- Honing skills to support you becoming employed

Tenant Volunteers Myth Buster

- Tenant Volunteers must sign an agreement to ensure that confidential information is not disclosed
- Tenant Volunteers are volunteers, and they are not paid, they **do not work** for Wokingham Borough Council.
- Tenant Volunteers **do not** receive preferential treatment
- Tenant Volunteers **must follow** the exact processes all tenants follow when reporting issues including repairs
- Tenant Volunteers do not raise their own issues at meetings
- Tenant Volunteers do not represent other individuals or groups; they put forward their personal thoughts and ideas, based on their own experiences as a tenant.

The **Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel** is a Wokingham Borough Council constituted group, chaired by a Tenant and with a membership made up of Tenant Chairs, Senior Managers, Councillors and Co-opted members from the Voluntary Sector and a Housing Association.

This group ensures Wokingham Borough Council are fully compliant to the Regulatory Standards (Consumer and Rent)

[Regulatory standards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/regulatory-standards)



There are also four formal groups, which Tenant Volunteers regularly attend, according to their interests and each group meets once a month for approximately two hours.

Repairs and Maintenance Group

Review and monitor all areas relating to the Repairs Service such as day to day repairs, planned maintenance, kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, grounds maintenance and gas servicing.

This group ensures Wokingham Borough Council are fully compliant to the Home Standard.

[Home Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/home-standard)



Neighbourhoods Group

Review and monitor areas such as the re-letting of empty properties (voids), rents, anti-social behaviour and our events within the neighbourhood.

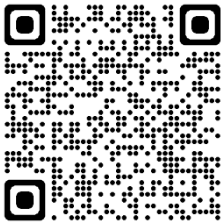
Plan, help to organise and attend large scale events such as the Community Fun Days.

This group ensures Wokingham Borough Council are fully compliant to the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, the Tenancy Standard and the Rent Standard.

[Neighbourhood and Community Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



[Rent Standard and guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



Communications Group

Review and approve publications for Housing Services including letters, leaflets, surveys, policies and procedure. Plan, collate and edit Housing Matters magazine and provide support with the Annual Report.

The first three groups are open to all tenants from Wokingham Borough Council housing and the Local Housing Companies (Loddon Homes and Berry Brook Homes).

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

[Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



The Independent Living Group - Sheltered Housing

This group is made up of Tenant Volunteers who live in one of the 8 sheltered housing properties in the Borough. They meet to discuss the current and future services for this group of tenants.

Tenant Involvement Strategy Group

This group is made up of Tenant Volunteers from the groups above, who come together to complete reviews of overall strategies and the Tenant Charter.

It is important to note that members of this group do not represent other individuals or groups; they put forward their thoughts and ideas, based on their experiences as a tenant.

To ensure compliance to the **Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code** Wokingham Borough Council have formed the Tenant Complaints Panel. This is made up of Tenant Volunteers who come together monthly to review anonymised complaints and give feedback on possible service improvements,

[Complaint Handling Code - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

